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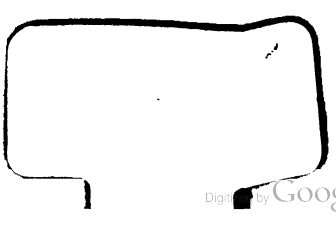

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Presented by the Rev.
Dr. Erskine, of Edinburgh,
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EVIDENCE

OF Sam'l. Miller's

MIRACLES:

OR, AN

EXHIBITION OF THE TESTIMONY

BY WHICH WE ARE INFORMED

THAT MIRACLES WERE WROUGHT

IN ATTESTATION OF

CHRISTIANITY.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE times were, when ſuperſtitious credulity ruled the human mind:—all was ſupernatural; and every ſtep you took was on magic ground. A crazed imagination peopled every ſcene in nature with prodigies and ſpirits; and aſcribed ſupernatural powers to the moſt ignorant and wretched of the human race. Thoſe wild and ungrounded imaginations have diſap-

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peared, before the light, which advancing ſcience, and free and manly thinking, have diffuſed. But ſcience, and freedom of thought, while they have diſpelled the phantoms of ſuperſtition, have brought in their train a new evil: Scepticiſm has occupied the place, which the departure of Superſtition had left vacant. Finding that the belief of ſupernatural occurrences has been carried to extravagant exceſs; the freethinker forms a ſweeping reſolution againſt every ſpecies of ſuch belief: He holds it a fixed principle, that the unvarying regularity of the laws of nature has in no inſtance admitted of exception; and he derides, as a fable, the dream of enthuſiaſm, or the fiction of impoſture; every pretended account of ſupernatural occurrences. Human nature is ever prone to fall into extremes; forgetting that truth is in general placed ſomewhere in the medium; and that thoſe, who

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who reſolve to ſtand at the fartheſt diſtant points of oppoſition, are moſt probably both of them taking their ſtations in the oppoſite regions of error.

It is the object of the following pages, to exhibit the teſtimony, by which we are informed, that ſupernatural works were wrought in atteſtation of the truth of Chriſtianity. The ſubject is not a new one. It has been diſcuſſed with ability and learning; and the advocates for miracles, have triumphed in the argument. The ability, the learning, and ſucceſs of thoſe advocates, do not preclude the poſſibility of the ſubject being ſtated in new and ſtronger points of view, and in points of view more adapted to the ideas, and more calculated to impreſs the underſtandings, of ſome particular claſs of readers. Whether the following pages contain views of this important ſubject,

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that are in any degree new, or ſtronger, or more adapted to the underſtandings of particular perſons, I leave to the judgement of thoſe, if any ſuch there ſhall be, who may take the trouble to peruſe them. If there be the leaſt probability of their having the ſmalleſt tendency to form, or increaſe conviction, on a point ſo ſuperlatively momentous, that is a ſufficient apology for their publication.

PRO-

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PROPOSITION I.

THAT MIRACLES ARE CAPABLE OF PROOF FROM TESTIMONY.

It was by the celebrated David Hume, that the truth of this propoſition was firſt made a queſtion; by him, whoſe ſophiſticating mind made a queſtion of every thing; whoſe reaſonings tended to deſtroy all belief whatever; to involve the underſtanding in complete and univerſal ſcepticiſm. The reaſoning of Mr Hume, as I underſtand it, is in ſubſtance this.

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"The univerſal experience, he ſays, of every age and country, is againſt the ſuppoſition of a miracle; the credit which we attach to teſtimony, is founded only on experience; and the beſt poſſible human teſtimony cannot be ſupported, by a more complete and univerſal experience, than that which oppoſes the belief of a miracle." If this reaſoning be ſound, it ſtops me; it renders unavailing the inquiries I propoſe to purſue; it ſaves the labour of hiſtorical reſearch; it ſilences the reaſoning of every advocate for miracles, and ſeals the mouth of every witneſs to their truth. With reſpect to the ſoundneſs of Mr Hume's reaſoning, I ſubmit to the reader the following obſervations.

In the firſt place, it is contrary to common ſenſe. Every perſon can recollect twelve men, on whoſe aſſertion, ſeriouſly made, and ſteadily perſiſted in, he would believe

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believe any thing: and he would ſmile at the metaphyſical ſubtlety by which you ſhould attempt to reaſon him into diſtruſt. Accordingly, Mr Hume himſelf, as is ſhewn by Dr Campbell, forſakes his own principle; and, unheedingly, overcome by the power of common ſenſe, he produces an imagined caſe, in which a ſuppoſed miracle might, by a ſuppoſed teſtimony, be credibly authenticated. His boaſted principle, the palladium of infidelity, the eternal ſilencer of every pleader for enthuſiaſm, is a mere metaphyſic ſpell, with which the magician promiſes to effect wonders; but which, when you come to try its power, breaks, and diſappears. Without following the metaphyſician through abſtract and ſubtle reaſonings, you need but approach his argument with the light of plain, ſound, common ſenſe; and it vaniſhes, as the phantom of the night from the emerging ſun.

With

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With reſpect to the ſoundneſs of Mr Hume's reaſoning, I obſerve, in the ſecond place, that its application to the ſubjects of human teſtimony, would be productive of conſequences, which all muſt allow to be abſurd and inadmiſſible. The principle may be ſhown to be a falſe one, by the rule of *reductio ad abſurdum*. If, then, you adopt the principle at all, you muſt adopt it, to the diſbelief of every thing that is unconformable to your own perſonal experience. According to this principle, the King of Siam did perfectly right, in diſbelieving the freezing of water; and, though all Europe had united in ſolemnly aſſerting the fact, he ought not to have believed it. There is indeed a difference between this fact, and a miracle. The one is agreeable to the eſtabliſhed laws of nature; the other is a deviation from them. But this is a difference which does not affect the application of

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of Mr Hume's principle. The freezing of water, was as completely different from any thing that ever fell within the experience of the King of Siam; as the reſurrection of a dead man, is from any thing that ever fell within mine. Although, therefore, all Europe could have united in aſſerting before him the freezing of water; the King of Siam ought not, on Mr Hume's logic, to have believed them: For, according to it, the evidence ariſing from the ſtrongeſt poſſible kind of human teſtimony, can only be equivalent to that ariſing from the moſt complete experience. But no experience could be more complete, than that which the King of Siam poſſeſſed, againſt the credibility of the freezing of water. This experience was therefore an equal match for any poſſible kind of human teſtimony: the evidence of the whole world could do no more than bring his mind into a ſtate of

ſcepticiſm,

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ſcepticiſm, whether ſuch a phenomenon did exiſt or not; and the only method in which he could arrive at a knowledge of the truth, would be, by his viſiting in perſon the countries where the phenomenon was ſaid to appear.

I am told, that there are countries, in which, during one part of the year, there is perpetual day, and during another, perpetual night. But as I have never viſited thoſe countries; as I am not, ſuppoſe, able to deduce, from the nature of the earth's motions, the neceſſity of thoſe reported phenomena; and as nothing can be more unconformable to my own experience, I am entitled, according to Mr Hume's principles, to hold ſuch accounts as fabulous, or, at the beſt, as entirely doubtful. A Greenlander, in like manner, could never be credibly informed of the exiſtence of that ſtate of nature

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nature which is general throughout the globe. "We live not, my fair," ſaid Aningait to Ajut, "in thoſe fabled countries, which lying ſtrangers ſo wantonly deſcribe, where the whole year is divided into ſhort days and nights." According to Mr Hume's principles, the logic of Aningait was juſt. In ſhort, my life has been ſpent in the iſland of Britain, and in the latter part of the eighteenth century. I have experienced the ſtate of nature that exiſts in this part of the world; the ſtate of manners that diſtinguiſhes my age and country. As the ſea, that waſhes the ſhores of the iſland of Britain, has bounded all my obſervation, I have had experience of no other ſtate of nature, or of manners. I have read, indeed, of other ſtates of nature, and of manners; of countries, where the ſun blazes inceſſant and ſcorching heat, or where his diſtant rays feebly mitigate the unrelenting

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unrelenting cold; of countries, where other dreſs, other laws, other religions, and other modes of life, diſtinguiſh the inhabitants; and where the aſpect of ſociety, as well as the ſtate of nature, are totally unconformable to any thing experienced by me. But it is in vain, that all the travellers who return from foreign parts, agree in aſſuring me of the truth of ſuch accounts as theſe; it is in vain, that thoſe travellers may conſtitute an endleſs multitude; that they may poſſeſs a character irreproachable for veracity; and that you may not be able to imagine a motive which could unite them in deceiving: It is all in vain: I muſt hold their accounts to be all romantic fables; or I muſt view them with a ſcepticiſm which ſhrinks from the ſmalleſt approach to conviction. All the teſtimony that can be given by man, can never ſurpaſs the oppoſite

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oppoſite evidence which my own unvaried experience affords me.

I dwell no longer on the abſurdities which would flow from the general application of this principle. I have ſaid enough, to afford ſufficient exemplification; and, from the abſurd and inadmiſſible nature of the conſequences that flow from it, I conclude, that the principle is falſe. I learn that a fountain is poiſoned, from conſidering the vicious quality of the ſtreams which it emits.

Having endeavoured to demonſtrate the falſehood of Mr Hume's principle, from its oppoſition to common ſenſe, and from the abſurd and inadmiſſible conſequences which flow from it, my next obſervations on it, will have for their object, to point out wherein its fallacy lies. On this reaſoning of Mr Hume, I muſt beg

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the reader to consult Paley, in the Introduction to his Evidences, and other authors; but, above all, the Answer of Dr Campbell to Mr Hume; a work, the perusal of which is indispensable to all who study the evidences of Christianity. I shall not transcribe the remarks of that acute and able author; but, in addition to those which he has advanced for pointing out the fallacy of Mr Hume's reasoning, I shall request the particular attention of the reader to the following observations.

The circumstances of the case may be such, that a miracle shall not, in any degree, be an improbable event. But, allow it to be in the highest degree improbable; you cannot allege, that it is impossible. Improbable you may allege it to be, that the Creator should deviate from his fixed laws of government: But you

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you cannot diſpute, that he may do ſo, if it pleaſe him. Improbable a miracle may be; it aſſuredly is not impoſſible. Now, obſerve the poſition which I go to endeavour to eſtabliſh, and to which I call the reader's particular attention. There may not merely be teſtimony of ſuch a kind, that its falſehood is improbable; of ſuch a kind, that its falſehood would be a miracle; of ſuch a kind, that its falſehood would be a greater miracle (if miracles can differ in magnitude) than any which it records: but there may be teſtimony of ſuch a kind, that its falſehood is, in the nature of the thing, abſolutely impoſſible. Suppoſe that teſtimony, of ſuch a kind as this, ſhall give us information of a miracle; then, the proof againſt the miracle, derived from experience, carry it as high as ever you chooſe, will only make its truth improbable; while the

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teſtimony, by which it is ſupported, will make its falſehood impoſſible.

Suppoſe there is a man, who, for many years, has been my intimate friend, and whom I do, on decided grounds, know to have a ſtrong regard for truth. This man aſſerts an extraordinary fact, of which he profeſſes to have been an eye-witneſs. I hear him, during the courſe of ſeveral years, perſiſting in the ſame aſſertion. I perceive, that he is in complete poſſeſſion of all his faculties; and that he carries along with him, in his mind, the recollection of his being in the habit of aſſerting this fact. I know that there is no poſſible motive, beſides his knowledge of its truth, which could lead him to make the aſſertion; and I perceive that, during the years in which he habitually makes it, he retains the ſame inviolable regard for truth, by

which

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which he was wont to be diſtinguiſhed. Now, let us examine the nature of the evidence which the ſuppoſed teſtimony would afford me. If this man perſiſt, without any motive, in telling a deliberate lie, he muſt be a lover of falſehood. But, according to the ſuppoſition, I know him to be a lover of truth. To ſay, therefore, that his aſſertion is not true, reduces you to this contradiction, that you make him to be, at one and the ſame time, a lover of falſehood, and a lover of truth. That my friend, after having been, during a long life, a lover of truth, ſhould, on a ſudden, change his character ſo much, as to perſiſt in telling a deliberate and untempted falſehood; this were perhaps a miracle. But that he ſhould retain his love of truth, which I have evidence of his doing, and at the ſame time perſiſt in a deliberate and untempted falſehood; this were not merely a thing

unconformable to any experience; it were not a miracle, but a contradiction and an impoſſibility.

Suppoſe I ſee a man willing to be conſumed by fire, rather than renounce an aſſertion, which, except on ſuppoſition of its truth, I know that he can have no motive for advancing. It is poſſible (it would be decidedly miraculous, but it is not, for any thing that we know, in the nature of things, impoſſible) that the conſtitution of this man may be ſo different from that of any other human being, as that the ideas of fire and death give him pleaſant ſenſations. But ſuppoſe that I am acquainted with the man; that I am his confidential friend. I ſit with him for ſome days before he is to be thrown into the flames. He expreſſes the utmoſt horror at the idea: He is frequently ſeized with convulſive

convulſive emotions of ſhrinking terror. He attempts to ſleep; but his reſt is broken. He mutters through his dreams the fears that diſturb his breaſt; and he awakens alarmed and diſturbed. He is led forth to execution. Terror is painted in every line of his countenance. At ſight of the flames, he is affected in a violent and extraordinary manner; and, by convulſive efforts, he tears himſelf from the hands of his guards. The Magiſtrate is touched with pity.—Abandon your falſe teſtimony, he exclaims, and all ſhall be well: Inſtantly, and with the utmoſt pleaſure, I ſhall command you to be ſet at freedom.—In the midſt of terrified cries, and with a countenance expreſſive of the utmoſt horror, the ſufferer exclaims, My teſtimony is not falſe, and abandon it I never will!—He is thrown into the flames; his cries rend the air; he undergoes a lingering death, amidſt convulſive

convulsive agonies; and the sight of his cruel sufferings melts to pity the hardest heart. Here, you will observe, I have decided evidence, that the flame affects this man in the cruellest manner. He undergoes it, however, rather than renounce a testimony, to which, if false, he can have no motive to adhere. If, then, this testimony be not true, this man must love the flames; they must be an object to which he runs with fondness. It is evident, however, that he hates them, and shrinks from them with horror. He cannot, at one time, both love and hate them; embrace them, and shrink from them. The falsehood therefore of his testimony, in the case supposed, would not imply a miracle, but a contradiction. —That the colour of a piece of silver, which is white, should instantly, without any human application, turn black; this were a miracle. That its colour should be

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be at the ſame time both black and white; this were a contradiction, and impoſſibility.—Suppoſe the aſſertion, for which, in the imagined caſe, the victim of perſecution endures the flames, to have been a miracle. It is poſſible, that, in certain caſes, a miracle may be an event very likely to happen. But, allow it to be as improbable, as Mr Hume or any perſon can deſire to ſuppoſe; ſtill, the proof from oppoſite experience, is outweighed by the proof from teſtimony; by all the difference that exiſts between an improbability and an impoſſibility.

According to the degree of certainty with which you may be able to diſcover a man's circumſtances and character, you can with the ſame degree of certainty determine what will be his conduct. That a man, entertaining a ſtrong regard for truth, ſhould tell a falſehood, to which he

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he has no temptation, is not improbable only; it is impoſſible. It is a thing contrary, not merely to experience, but to the nature of things. When two angles of a triangle are given, you diſcover the magnitude of the third angle: not from trials; not from experience: but from demonſtration; from the nature of things. In like manner, when a man's character and ſituation are given, his conduct may be certainly determined, not from experience, but from the nature of things; a particular conduct being the certain reſult of a given character and ſituation.

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PROPOSITION II.

THAT THOSE, WHO FIRST PREACHED CHRISTIANITY, DID PROFESS TO WORK MIRACLES, IN ATTESTATION OF ITS TRUTH.

THE Chriſtians with one voice agree, that the firſt heavenly meſſengers wrought miracles. Amidſt all the different opinions that have divided and ſubdivided the Chriſtian church; amidſt all the wandering fancies by which their ſpeculations have perverted the faith to which they adhere;

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adhere; this is ſtill a point on which they are at one. The earlieſt writers of the Chriſtian Church, aſſert the working of miracles, in unequivocal and undoubting terms. "The works of our Saviour," ſays Quadratus, "were always conſpicu-
"ous, for they were real: both they
"that were healed, and they that were
"raiſed from the dead, were ſeen, not
"only when they were healed and raiſed,
"but for a long time afterwards; not
"only whilſt he dwelled on this earth,
"but alſo after his departure, and for a
"good while after it; inſomuch as that
"ſome of them have reached to our
"times *." Quadratus lived about ſeventy years after the aſcenſion. "Chriſt," ſays Juſtin Martyr, (who lived about thirty years after Quadratus), "healed thoſe
"who, from their birth, were blind, and
"deaf, and lame †." "That perſon," ſays

* Euſ. Hiſt. l. 4. ch. 3.
† Juſt. Dial. p. 258. ed. Thirlby.

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ſays Tertullian, (whoſe time was ſomewhat later than that of Juſtin Martyr), "whom "the Jews had vainly imagined, from "the meanneſs of his appearance, to be "a mere man, they afterwards, in con- "ſequence of the power he exerted, "conſidered as a magician, when he, "with one word, ejected devils out of "the bodies of men; gave ſight to the "blind; cleanſed the leprous; ſtrength- "ened the nerves of thoſe that had the "palſy; and, laſtly, with one command "reſtored the dead to life *." "Un- "doubtedly," ſays Origen, (who lived about the firſt half of the third century), "we do think him to be the Chriſt, "and the Son of God, becauſe he heal- "ed the lame and the blind †." The early enemies of Chriſtianity, ſpeak of Jeſus as a worker of miracles. We have

* Tertul. Apol. p. 20. ed. Priorii. Par. 1675.
† Orig. con. Celſ. lib. 2. ſec. 48.

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in our hands the books of the New Teſtament, written by the firſt preachers of Chriſtianity. Theſe books are full of the accounts of miracles. Paul calls them the ſigns of an Apoſtle. Mark concludes his Goſpel thus: "And they went forth "and preached every where, the Lord "working with them, and confirming "the word with ſigns following."—Acts, ii. ch. 43. ver. 2. clauſe: "And many "wonders and ſigns were done by the "Apoſtles." In Acts viii. 13. it is ſaid, that "Simon, formerly a ſorcerer, con-"tinued with Philip, and wondered, be-"holding the miracles and ſigns which "were done."—Acts, vi. 8. "And "Stephen, full of faith and power, did "great wonders and miracles."—Acts, xiv. 3. "Long time, therefore, abode "they" (Paul and Barnabas) "ſpeak-"ing boldly in the Lord, which gave "teſtimony unto the word of his grace,

"and

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" and granted ſigns and wonders to be " done by their hands. "—Acts, xv. 12. " Then all the multitude kept ſilence, " and gave audience to Paul and Barnabas, declaring what miracles and " wonders God had wrought among " the Gentiles by them. "—Acts, v. 12. " And by the hands of the Apoſtles " were many ſigns and wonders wrought " among the people; inſomuch, that they " brought forth the ſick into the ſtreets, " and laid them on beds and couches, " that, at the leaſt, the ſhadow of Peter " paſſing by, might overſhadow ſome of " them. There came alſo a multitude " from the cities round about, unto Je- " ruſalem, bringing ſick folks, and them " which were vexed with unclean ſpirits; " and they were healed every one. " The Goſpels and book of Acts, contain a variety of particular accounts of miracles.

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It appears then undoubted, that thoſe who firſt preached Chriſtianity, did profeſs to work miracles in atteſtation of its truth. I do not indeed know that this point has been ever controverted: I am ſure that it could not be controverted with any appearance of reaſon. Miracles were the ſigns, the badges, the conſtant attendants of a Chriſtian preacher. The evidence for this propoſition would be concluſive, even if you ſhould not take into conſideration the certainty of the books of the New Teſtament being authentic. Indeed, the authenticity of the books of the New Teſtament, is not abſolutely neceſſary to the proof of any one of my propoſitions; and the important concluſion, which is meant to be their reſult, may be eſtabliſhed without taking that into conſideration. It would not, however, be eſtabliſhed with ſo much certainty. The authenticity of the books does

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does not only put this propoſition out of all kind of doubt; but it is alſo of the deepeſt importance throughout the future propoſitions. I ſhall therefore cloſe this ſection, with ſaying a few words on this ſubject.

I do not ſuppoſe that there is any thing, in antiquity, more perfectly aſcertained, than the authenticity of thoſe books of the New Teſtament, which are termed ὁμολογουμενα. This important point is eſtabliſhed by the alluſions and quotations of writers, united in a cloſe, unbroken ſucceſſion, from the age when Chriſtianity appeared. This branch of the evidence is exhibited, in full detail, by Lardner, in the ſecond part of his Credibility, whoſe valuable book is abridged by Paley, in his Evidences. The authenticity is farther proved, from the intimate knowledge which the writers diſcover, of

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the ſtate of things in the age and country to which the books are aſcribed. The inſtances, on which the ſtrength of this argument depends, are collected by Lardner, in the firſt part of the Credibility; and his work is abridged by Paley. The coincidences, obviouſly undeſigned, which exiſt between the Acts of the Apoſtles, and Paul's letters, afford an argument for the authenticity; which is excellently illuſtrated by Paley, in a work, entitled, Horæ Paulinæ. Another argument is derived from the peculiarity of the ſtyle of the New Teſtament, which, in ſome degree, fixes it down to a particular age and country.

It is certainly an important, if it be (of which I am no judge) a juſt obſervation, That the ſtyle of the New Teſtament is different from that of any of the eminent writers in the early Chriſtian

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Chriſtian Church, from whom the fabrication might have been ſuppoſed to proceed. For this argument, conſult the 10th ſection, 2d chapter of Michaelis's Introductory Lectures, and Paley.

I do not enter on the proofs for the authenticity; I only point out ſome of the principal heads of proof, and the authors in whoſe valuable works a full exhibition of thoſe proofs may be found. The reſult of an impartial inquiry into this ſubject, will be, I ſhould think, a conviction, that the authenticity of the ὁμολογουμενα *, is better eſtabliſhed, by far, than that of any other ancient book; and is a point which ought by all means to be received

* This name includes the whole, excepting 2. Peter, 2. and 3. John, James, Jude, Revelation, and, I think, the Epiſtle to the Hebrews. From theſe books not being ranked among the ὁμολογουμενα, it does by no means neceſſarily follow, that they are placed in the Canon without ſufficient grounds.

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received as indiſputably certain. If thoſe books came from the hands of the firſt Chriſtian preachers; there is then, of courſe, no doubt that thoſe preachers profeſſed to work miracles: For thoſe books are full of that profeſſion: They repreſent miracles, as the ſigns of an Apoſtle *; as the credentials on which he claimed to be believed; and to which he challenged the attention of the world.

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* 2. Cor. xii. 12.—"Truly the ſigns of an Apoſtle "were wrought among you in all patience, in ſigns, and "wonders, and mighty deeds."

PRO-

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PROPOSITION III.

THAT THE ASSERTION OF THE FIRST PREACHERS THEMSELVES, WITH RESPECT TO THEIR POSSESSION OF MIRACULOUS POWERS, IS ENTIRELY DESERVING OF CREDIT.

THAT the firſt preachers of Chriſtianity could not be themſelves deceived with reſpect to their poſſeſſion of miraculous powers, is extremely obvious. Enthuſiaſm may make a man imagine, before trial, that he can ſpeak languages which he has never learned: But it cannot make him

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him ſpeak them; it cannot hinder him from perceiving, that his attempts to do it are vain. If the Apoſtles pretended to ſpeak, fluently, languages which they had never learned; then this pretenſion muſt either have been true, or wilfully falſe. If it was not true, then the Apoſtles could not ſpeak thoſe languages at all; or, if they could, the faculty of doing ſo, muſt have been the natural conſequence of previous inſtruction: and the one or the other of theſe circumſtances could not be unknown to the Apoſtles at the time when they aſſerted the contrary. When a profeſſed meſſenger from Heaven does no more than deliver doctrine and advice, he may be an enthuſiaſt. But when he pretends to produce external, viſible effects, unconformable to the courſe of nature, he muſt either poſſeſs miraculous powers, or he muſt be, not an enthuſiaſt, but a knave.

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There is an obſervation of Paley, which, if it be a juſt one, appears to me moſt important indeed. In conſidering the evidence for the reſurrection, he remarks, that the ſuppoſition of the Apoſtles knowingly publiſhing a falſehood, is, he thinks, pretty generally given up. But if Infidelity abandon this ground, to what other can ſhe retire? Could enthuſiaſm perſuade the Apoſtles that Lazarus was living, and, in their view, engaging in the buſineſs of life, when his body was yet lying in the tomb? Could it perſuade Peter and John, that they ſaw the lame man at the temple ſpring up, and uſe his limbs, when, in fact, he continued lame and motionleſs? Could it perſuade them, that the body of Jeſus had left the ſepulchre, when, before their eyes, it was lying there? Had the Apoſtles pretended only to viſions, to private revelations, to inward feelings; the charge of enthuſiaſm might

might not have been juſt, but it might have deſerved a hearing. As the caſe ſtands, it ſeems ridiculous; ſince no enthuſiaſm could perſuade men that they ſaw a man walking, who was lying lame before their eyes.

The Apoſtles, then, could not be deceived themſelves: there cannot be a more ridiculous ſuppoſition. Could they then intend to deceive? Let us recollect who they were. The maſter, if he were indeed a mere man, was the ſon of a Jewiſh carpenter. His followers were ſelected from the fiſhermen of Galilee. They were rude and ſimple men, untutored in ſcience, ignorant of learning, untrained to ſpeculation, and, by their humble ſituation, forbidden to entertain aſpiring thoughts. Did men like theſe form a ſcheme, the moſt tranſcendently great, and the moſt unparalleledly daring, that

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that ever entered man's mind? a ſcheme, for changing the religion of the world; for overturning all the ſyſtems that then exiſted; for ſubſtituting, in their place, one grand, univerſal form of religion; and for effecting this greateſt of revolutions by means of miracles, for the performance of which, they knew that they poſſeſſed no powers?

If ever there were a ſcheme, daring, difficult, impracticable to all human appearance, it was the inſtitution of a new, a pure, and univerſal religion, erected in the room of Judaiſm, and on the ruins of every ſyſtem of Heathen mythology, deeply and immoveably eſtabliſhed as thoſe ſyſtems ſeemed to be in the intereſts of the powerful, and in the prejudices of the people. Is it poſſible that men like the firſt preachers of Chriſtiani-

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ty, ſhould riſe from the confinement of mind to which their humble labours ſubjected them, to form this moſt daring and gigantic, unprecedented, and apparently beyond every thing impracticable, plan of deception? But, make the ſuppoſition, that the ſon of a Jewiſh carpenter, and fiſhermen of Galilee, did form the deſign of converting the world, by the force of miracles which were to be wrought throughout the nations, and for which they poſſeſſed no real powers; make the ſuppoſition, and then let us mark their hiſtory, when engaged in the execution of the nefarious ſcheme.

Jeſus Chriſt travelled through Judea, for four years, in a mean condition. He had not, ſometimes, a place where to lay his head. He attracted the moſt virulent hatred of the leading men in Judea. He was forced to ſhun their rage, in diſtant corners

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corners of the country. He was deſtitute of riches, or of grandeur; an outcaſt, perſecuted man. He ſought not to raiſe himſelf. When the people would have made him a king, he declined the proffered honour; he declared, that he had no concern in their civil matters. His followers expected that he would mount the throne; break from his country's neck the yoke of Roman bondage; and carry his arms, crowned with victory and renown, over many lands. He told them, that theſe hopes were vain; that he was to be diſtinguiſhed, not by victory and proſperity, but by ſuffering; that he was to die the ignominious and cruel death of the meaneſt malefactors. He needed not perhaps have been a prophet to have made this prediction. What other fate was likely to await a poor, unprotected individual, expoſed to the bitter hatred of thoſe who were the leading

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men of the country? He went up to meet his fate. He came to Jeruſalem, preached publicly, and ſcrupled not to expoſe the vices of the leading men. He was ſeized. He was aſked, if he adhered to thoſe high pretenſions, which were to coſt him his life. He was aſked, if he was the Chriſt, the Son of the Bleſſed. He replied, that he was. They exclaimed, that he was a blaſphemer; carried him to Pilate; extorted the ſentence of condemnation; and led him away to Mount Calvary. What is the inference which we are to draw from this detail? Is it not, that Jeſus, if he were not indeed the Chriſt, formed a plan of deception, in order that he might purchaſe for himſelf hatred, perſecution, and untimely death; while he declined uſing the means, either for gratifying his ambition, or ſecuring his ſafety?

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The hiſtory and behaviour of the diſciples, alſo, refute the ſuppoſition of impoſture. What effect had the fate of their Maſter upon their conduct? There were two methods, which they might have adopted: They might have renounced the undertaking, the difficulty and danger of which they had experienced, and ſtrikingly witneſſed, in their Maſter's cruel death: They might have returned to thoſe occupations which his invitation had made them leave; and have lived in peace, in ſafety, and in innocence: Or they might continue to proſecute the deſign, for which, a ſhort while before, they had ſeen their Maſter nailed to the croſs. They adopted the latter part. They ſtood before his powerful murderers, and told them, that they had killed the *Prince of Life;* that Jeſus was indeed the Chriſt; that he was riſen from the dead. They went throughout

the nations; they told mankind, that the religion of their anceſtors, and of their country, which was interwoven whith the government, upheld by the ſtateſmen, by the prieſts, and by the people—they told them, that it was impiety and folly. Among the Jews, and among the Gentiles, wherever they went, they drew upon themſelves, (and what other treatment could they expect?) they drew upon themſelves the indignation, oppoſition, hatred, perſecution of the ſtateſmen, the prieſts, and the people. They perſiſted notwithſtanding. They perſiſted in a courſe of conduct which was obviouſly pregnant with poverty, contempt, reproach, peril, and death; and they ended their toilſome, perſecuted lives, in the flames, or on the croſs.

And what was their comfort and ſupport under theſe dangers and afflictions? What was

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was it that they ſought to gain, by renouncing their eaſe, their ſafety, and their lives? Was it a guilty conſcience? Did they renounce every outward bleſſing, in order that they might alſo forfeit all internal peace of mind? Did they court the flames, and the croſs, in order that they might obtain thoſe after puniſhments which even *natural* religion preſents to the terrified view of the guilty mind?— Behold the apoſtles of Jeſus, working with their own hands for ſubſiſtence, outcaſt, perſecuted, beaten, impriſoned, and nigh unto death: Behold them, reſigning their eaſe, their comfort, and their ſafety: Behold them, advancing, with intrepid countenance, to endure the torture and death which perſecution has prepared. And do you not perceive, in theſe diſaſtrous circumſtances, the conſpicuous marks of their ſincerity? Can you doubt a teſtimony, the ſupport of which coſt its adherents

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adherents ſo dear? a teſtimony, which is ſubſtantiated, not merely by their ſolemn aſſeverations, but by their renunciation, for its ſake, of all that is deareſt to the heart of man?—This Propoſition has been illuſtrated and proven, very fully and ably, and with impenetrable ſtrength of argument, by a variety of authors—Littleton, Weſt, Ditton, Bonnet, Clarke, Paley, &c.

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PROPOSITION IV.

THAT THE PERSONS PROFESSING CHRISTIANITY, WHO LIVED WITHIN HALF A CENTURY AFTER THE DEATH OF JESUS, (WHICH PERIOD MAY BE RECKONED THE APOSTOLIC AGE), CONSTITUTED AN IMMENSE MULTITUDE.

In illuſtrating this Propoſition, we will not inquire what might be the conqueſts of Chriſtianity beyond the limits of the Roman Empire; but, confining our view within thoſe limits, we will endeavour to form

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form ſome idea of the number of early Chriſtians pervading that extenſive portion of the globe.

The Roman Empire, according to the beſt calculation which Mr Gibbon could form, contained within it a hundred and twenty millions of people. In purſuing our examination into the number of the firſt Chriſtians, I ſhall divide the Empire into two great departments; the firſt, embracing all the Aſiatic provinces, together with Greece, the iſlands between it and Aſia, and the north-eaſt of Africa; the ſecond, including all the other parts of the Empire. I ſhall reckon the population of the firſt at forty-five millions; ſeventy-five millions will, of courſe, conſtitute the population of the ſecond department.—Let us direct our examination to the former of thoſe two departments.

The

The firſt ſource, from which we may derive information on this point, is the book of Acts. In this book, we are informed, that at Antioch in Syria, at Joppa, Epheſus, Corinth, Theſſalonica, Berea, Iconium, Derbe, Antioch in Piſidia, at Lydda, Saron, the converts were, "a great number"—"great multitudes"—"much people." Of Jeruſalem it is remarked how many thouſands (μυριαδες, ten thouſands) there were in that city, who believed.

The letters of the Apoſtles conſtitute the next ſource of information. The firſt Epiſtle of Peter, addreſſes the Chriſtians throughout Pontus, Galatia, Aſia, Cappadocia, and Bithynia. The Epiſtles of Paul, addreſs the various churches of Corinth, Philippi, Theſſalonica, Galatia, Epheſus, and Coloſſe; they mention the churches

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churches of Judea, the churches of Aſia, and all the churches of the Gentiles.

The letter, written on the ſubject of the Chriſtians by Pliny, governor of Pontus and Bithynia, to the Emperor Trajan, affords us very intereſting and important information, with reſpect to the prevalence of Chriſtianity. In this celebrated letter, the Governor informs the Emperor, that many, of all ages, of both ſexes, and of every rank, were, and would be accuſed of Chriſtian principles; that the contagion had ſeized, not the cities only, but the leſſer towns, and open country; that there had been few purchaſers of victims; that the temples had been almoſt forſaken; that the ſacred ſolemnities had been long intermitted *. This letter was written about the beginning of the ſecond century. It ſpeaks of ſome

* Lib. 10. Ep. 97.

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ſome who had been Chriſtians twenty years before; it refers the ſtrong expreſſions reſpecting the prevalence of Chriſtianity to a paſt time; and repreſents the evil (ſuch the writer accounted it) as now beginning to be rectified. It mentions the ſacred ſolemnities as having been intermitted long. The deſcription, therefore, of the prevalence of Chriſtianity, may be very fairly applied to the Apoſtolic age. And mark in what terms the deſcription runs:—The want of purchaſers for the victims—the deſertion of the temples—the diſcontinuance of the ſacred ſolemnities. Do not theſe expreſſions ſeem to indicate, that, in Pontus and Bithynia, the revolution of ſentiment had been general, and, before the application of correcting meaſures, had nearly proved fatal to the ancient ſuperſtitions? This important information is given us by a man upon the ſpot, who

had the beſt means of knowing the true ſtate of the caſe; and who, being officially concerned in the buſineſs, was intereſted in obtaining that knowledge. It is given us by a man, writing coolly, in his cloſet, a letter to his maſter and friend: It is given us by an enemy.—Mr Gibbon ſays, that the expreſſions of Pliny ſhould be taken with candid allowance: but he gives no reaſon why they ſhould: and, until a ſatisfactory reaſon be given, it may perhaps appear moſt candid, as well as moſt reaſonable, to believe Pliny, and to take his words as a true repreſentation of the ſtate of the fact.

Juſtin Martyr wrote about thirty years after Pliny; a paſſage from whom follows: "There is not a nation, either of Greek, "or Barbarian, or any other name, even "of thoſe who wander in tribes, and live "in tents, amongſt whom prayers and "thankſ-

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" thankſgivings are not offered to the " Father and Creator of the univerſe, by " the name of the crucified JESUS *."

Tertullian, about fifty years after Juſtin, has the following words: " We " were but of yeſterday; and we have " filled your cities, iſlands, towns, and " boroughs, the camp, the ſenate, and the " forum. They " (the enemy) " lament, " that every ſex, age, and condition, " and perſons of every rank, alſo, are con- " verts to that name †." " Although, " ſays the ſame writer, " ſo great a num- " ber, that in almoſt every city we form " the greater part, we paſs our time " modeſtly, and in ſilence ‡."

Clemens Alexandrinus, towards the end of the ſecond century, ſays: " The

 " doctrine

* Dial. cum Tryph.
† Tertull. Apol. c. 37. ‡ Ad Scapul. c. III.

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" doctrine of our Maſter did not remain " in Judea, as philoſophy did in Greece ; " but it has been diffuſed through the " whole world—κατα εθνος, και κωμην, και " πολιν πᾶσαν *. " And ſays Origen, in the earlier part of the third century : " In every part of the world, throughout " all Greece, and in all other nations, " there are innumerable and immenſe " multitudes, who have given themſelves " up to the law of Moſes, and the reli- " gion of Chriſt †. "

Arnobius, in the beginning of the fourth century, ſpeaks of the whole world as filled with Chriſt's doctrines ; of its diffuſion throughout all countries ; of an innumerable body of Chriſtians in diſtant provinces ; of the ſtrange revolution of opinion of men of the greateſt

* Clem. Alex. Strom. lib. 6. ad fin.
† Orig. contra Celſ. lib. 1.

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greateſt genius,—orators, grammarians, rhetoricians, lawyers, phyſicians,—having come over to the inſtitution ‡. " Licet " adhuc, " ſays Julius Firmicus Maternus, about the middle of the fourth century, " in quibuſdam regionibus idololatriæ " morientia palpitent membra, " &c.—a coarſe, indelicate, ſhocking figure; but ſtrongly indicating the entire predominance of Chriſtianity. " Solitudinem " patitur, " ſays Jerome, fifty years after, " et in urbe gentilitas. "

If you conſider the ſentiments generally entertained, and the practice generally obſerved by ambitious ſtateſmen, on the ſubject of religion; if you conſider, the particular character and circumſtances of Conſtantine, along with the ſuſpicious account which he gives

‡ Arnob. in Gentes, l. 1. p. 27. 9. 24. 42. 44. edit. Lug. Bat. 1650.

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of his converſion; if you conſider, the neceſſity to which the rulers of mankind find themſelves ſubjected, of conſulting the diſpoſition of their ſubjects in matters of religion, and the difficulty of impoſing on a nation a religion repugnant to its principles; you will perhaps be diſpoſed to think, that the profeſſion of Chriſtianity by the great Conſtantine, and its public eſtabliſhment as the religion of the Empire, are proofs of the decided predominance which the Chriſtian intereſt had then obtained over the Pagan.

When you lay theſe circumſtances, ſtated above, together; when you conſider, that in Pontus and Bithynia, ſituated at the extremity of the circle round Jeruſalem, which conſtitutes the firſt department, Chriſtianity had nearly extirpated the ancient ſuperſtitions; when you

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you consider the language of the outcry at Thessalonica, that these were they who had turned the world upside down*; when you consider in how many places, within this department, the Christians are described by the expressions, "much people"—"a great number"—"great multitudes;" when you consider the strong language employed by the writers of the second and third centuries, in describing the prevalence of Christianity, and that, soon after the beginning of the fourth, it ascended the throne of the Empire, and became the national establishment: Does it not appear probable, from these considerations, that Christianity could not, within this department, embrace less than a sixth part of the population?

* Acts, xvii. 6. ανασρεφαντες. perhaps "are turning," &c.

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I ſhall ſuppoſe, then, that in the firſt department, containing forty-five millions of people, the Chriſtians amounted to ſeven millions and a half. In the ſecond department, including the countries more remote from Judea, and containing ſeventy-five millions of people, I ſhall ſuppoſe a fifteenth part, amounting to five millions, to have eſpouſed Chriſtianity. The conſiderations, advanced above, apply, in a certain degree, to this department too; and there falls to be added to them the teſtimony of Tacitus; who, in relating Nero's perſecution, ſays, that a huge multitude of Chriſtians (*ingens multitudo*) were diſcovered by thoſe firſt ſeized. It is not to be ſuppoſed that the whole body of Chriſtians would be diſcovered and apprehended; and the vaſt multitude of thoſe who were, teſtifies ſtrongly to the prevalence of the religion in that diſtant and corrupted capital.

The

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The inhabitants of the world are nearly changed in the ſpace of ſixty or ſeventy years. Suppoſe that the Apoſtolic age laſted half a century, and that the average number of Chriſtians within the Empire, during that period, amounted to twelve millions and a half; there would, in this caſe, fall to be added two thirds, or more, in order to make out the whole number of Chriſtians, who lived in the Empire during that period of time: Add only about one third. Take thus the whole amount at ſixteen millions, ſix hundred and ſixty thouſand; deduct from this amount, two fifths, as perſons under age, or from any other cauſe devoid of underſtanding; and there will remain about ten millions.

In the preceding calculations, while endeavouring to aſcertain the number that profeſſed Chriſtianity during the firſt half century

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century after the death of Jeſus, I have adduced evidence, tending to ſhew the aſcendancy which Chriſtianity had acquired in the ſecond and third centuries, and the beginning of the fourth. This evidence, though not bearing, in the moſt direct manner, upon the point which I wanted to eſtabliſh, was of very high and obvious importance. The greater was the number of Chriſtians at the end of the three firſt centuries, the greater number does it preſuppoſe at the end of the firſt half century: And if you were to ſuppoſe that Chriſtianity gained equal acceſſions of numbers, in equal times; the number of Chriſtians, at the end of the three firſt centuries, would, according to this ſuppoſition, preſuppoſe the ſixth part of that number at the end of the firſt half century. In zeal, in courage, in enterprize, in ability; in the capacity, from whenceſoever derived, of promoting their

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their cauſe; the firſt propagators of the religion were not probably inferior to their ſucceſſors.

It may be thought, perhaps, that thoſe perſecutions, which ſo ſeverely tried the conſtancy of the firſt Chriſtians—which founded the church in the blood of its martyrs—were favourable to the increaſe of its numbers. It is a remark which has been frequently made, that religious ſects thrive amidſt perſecution; that deriſion, reproaches, danger, impriſonment, exile, and death, form the moſt kindly and ſucceſsful means of foſtering their growth. Such a remark has ſtrongly the appearance of a paradox, and runs violently againſt the obvious probability of the caſe. I believe, however, that inſtances to juſtify it are not wanting; but I do not by any means think that it will hold univerſally true. When the perſe-

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cutors are not armed with ſufficient power, or do not exert their power with ſufficient vigour; ſuch perſecution, too weak to ſubdue, may only ſerve to irritate rage, to animate zeal, to awaken compaſſion, to increaſe the popularity and the progreſs of the cauſe, againſt which it directs its feeble and ineffective efforts. But, where perſecution is ſufficiently vigorous, prudent, and powerful, however it may animate the zeal, and confirm the conſtancy of ſincere and dauntleſs minds, it will probably have a tendency to check the progreſs of the cauſe. That the meaſures adopted by the Roman government, for the ſuppreſſion of Chriſtianity, were attended, in ſome degree, with their natural conſequences, appears, beſide other evidence, from the letter of Pliny to Trajan, quoted above. If, then, the perſecutions under which the Chriſtians laboured for three centuries, were inimical to the

the progreſs of the religion; they then ſerve to ſtrengthen the argument, derived from its ſubſequent progreſs, in favour of the ſucceſs of its firſt propagators.

Mr Gibbon ſuppoſes, that previous to Conſtantine's converſion, Chriſtianity embraced no more than a twentieth part of the population of the Empire. One of the grounds on which he makes this computation, is a paſſage of Origen, in which that writer repreſents the number of the faithful as inconſiderable, when compared with the multitude of an unbelieving world. Mr Gibbon terms this teſtimony unexceptionable.—But we know that men, attached to religion, diſplay ſometimes an improper diſpoſition to exaggerate the prevalence of infidelity. Is it poſſible, that Origen might honour with the name of faithful, not all who profeſſed Chriſtianity, but thoſe only who adhered to what he

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deemed its ſtrict and proper principles and practice? Might not the remark be local, confined to the city or diſtrict where Origen reſided? At any rate, the remark is indefinite, and is conſiſtent with the idea of a fifteenth, or even of a ſixth part of the population being Chriſtian.

The next ground of Mr Gibbon's computation, is a paſſage of Chryſoſtom, which repreſents the number of Chriſtians at Antioch, in the reign of Theodoſius, as amounting only to a hundred thouſand; a number, in Mr Gibbon's opinion, not exceeding a fifth part of the population of that great city. This paſſage, however, is oppoſed by another declaration of the ſame writer, in which he ſtates the Chriſtians as ſuperior, in number, to both Jews and Pagans; and this latter declaration acquires the higheſt probability, from the ſtill ſtronger aſſertions of other writers,

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writers, and from the length of time during which Chriſtianity had now enjoyed Imperial favour and national eſtabliſhment. Is it poſſible, that thoſe under age may have been excluded from Chryſoſtom's firſt computation; or that that computation may have been highly inaccurate and erroneous? Is it poſſible, that the victims of the earthquake in the time of the elder Juſtin, or the ſurvivors of that calamity, may have been fewer than imagined? Is it poſſible, that Antioch might be more populous in the reign of the elder Juſtin, than it had been a hundred and fifty years before, in the reign of Theodoſius? Or, if theſe ſuppoſitions are all inadmiſſible, and Mr Gibbon's calculations all juſt; Does not, then, the length of time during which Chriſtianity had been the religion of the Emperor and of the State, together with the teſtimony of different writers, entitle us to conclude,

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that, in this caſe, ſome peculiar cauſes had rendered Antioch an exception to the general ſtate of the Empire?

Another ground of Mr Gibbon's computation, is the ſituation of the church of Rome about the middle of the third century; the numbers of which are deduced from the known number of thoſe who were maintained out of the public funds; a certain proportion being ſuppoſed to exiſt between this latter claſs of people and the whole body. The information which we have, is, that the dependants on the public funds amounted to fifteen hundred. The grounds on which Mr Gibbon concludes, from this fact, that the whole body of Chriſtians amounted only to fifty thouſand, although I think they ſeem probable and fair, are not certain: Neither is it certain that Rome contained a million of inhabitants. But, allowing that the Chriſtians

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ians did conſtitute only a twentieth part of the population of Rome, are there not viſible circumſtances preventing us from applying the caſe of Rome to the Empire at large? Great cities are liable to be contaminated with peculiar corruption of manners. Rome was at a great diſtance from Jeruſalem. It was filled with the nobles; with the great officers of ſtate, who were alſo the miniſters of religion; with all the firmeſt ſupporters of the ancient ſuperſtitions, from whoſe proud gates Chriſtianity was moſt likely to be haughtily and ſternly debarred. Rome was the ſeat of that government which viewed Chriſtianity with a hoſtile eye, and directed againſt its profeſſors the rage of perſecution. At Rome, particularly, the church of Chriſt, placed under the immediate inſpection and enmity of its powerful enemies, might be ſtinted in its growth. The place where a Heathen,

perſecuting government, held its ſeat, was not ſurely the place in which a Chriſtian church might be expected to be found in a thriving condition. I regret, that in examining theſe paſſages of Mr Gibbon, I have not been able to conſult the original authors. The remarks, however, which I have made on them, may ſerve to ſhew, that the grounds on which Mr Gibbon forms his computation of the number of Chriſtians, are not ſufficient for eſtabliſhing that computation.

But let us ſuppoſe, that his computation is juſt; and that, before the converſion of Conſtantine, the Chriſtians conſtituted no more than a twentieth part of the population of the Empire. Let us ſuppoſe, that, in the face of deſtroying perſecutions, which conſigned many to untimely death; which might baniſh many beyond the confines of the Empire; which might occaſion frequent

frequent defertions from the church; which erected around her ſo formidable a barrier againſt the entrance of additional numbers—the church did however gain equal acceſſions in equal times. According to this ſuppoſition, ſix millions, at the end of three centuries, would preſuppoſe one million at the end of the firſt half century. To compenſate the waſte and renewal taking place during that period, add a third. From the amount ſubtract, on account of thoſe incapable of giving teſtimony, two fifths; the remainder will be about eight hundred thouſand.

The particular calculations which I have made, have been perfectly rude and uncertain. Our information is too general, for at all enabling us to count the number of Chriſtians who lived in the Apoſtolic age. I have therefore ſtated this propoſition in general terms. And, however

ever the reader ſhould not go fully along with me in all my remarks and calculations; however his ideas of the number of Chriſtians in the Apoſtolic age, ſhould fall ſhort of thoſe which I am diſpoſed to entertain; in ſhort, whatever ſhould be the different views entertained by different perſons on an indefinite ſubject; I think that enough has been advanced, to ſatisfy every perſon of the truth of the general propoſition, *viz.* That thoſe perſons who profeſſed Chriſtianity within the ſpace of half a century after the death of Jeſus, conſtituted an immenſe multitude.

Note.—Since writing the above obſervations, I have had an opportunity of conſulting Lardner, to whom Mr Gibbon, in a note, ſtates himſelf as indebted for the

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the information from Chryſoſtom, reſpecting the Chriſtian numbers at Antioch. It there appears that Chryſoſtom, in one place, computes the Chriſtians of Antioch at a hundred thouſand, (δεκα μυριαδες), uſing however the expreſſion, I think, (οἰμαι); and that, in another place, he calls the Chriſtians the majority of the inhabitants.

Mr Gibbon calculates the inhabitants of Antioch at half a million: and in order to reconcile theſe two paſſages of Chryſoſtom with his own view of the population of Antioch, he introduces the following paſſage: "The ſolution of "this apparent difficulty, is eaſy and ob- "vious. The eloquent preacher draws "a parallel between the civil and the "eccleſiaſtical conſtitution of Antioch; "between the liſt of Chriſtians who had "acquired heaven by baptiſm, and the liſt

" liſt of citizens who had a right to " ſhare the public liberality. Slaves, " ſtrangers, and infants, were comprized " in the former; they were excluded " from the latter *. "

Now, it appears to me at once obvious and undoubted, that the ſolution of the imagined difficulty, is not to be found in this ſtrained and unſubſtantiated conjecture; but in a third paſſage of Chryſoſtom, which, in the edition of Lardner conſulted by me, is the firſt thing quoted in that ſhort paragraph which contains the two paſſages above mentioned. That paragraph begins thus: " He " (Chryſoſtom) " computes the inhabitants of " Antioch at two hundred thouſand. " It will now, perhaps, ſtrike the reader, that the ſuppoſed difficulty vaniſhes. When, inſtead of Mr Gibbon's, you take the

* Vol. I. ch. 15. Section, entitled, *Church of Antioch.*

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the ancient Father's own computation of the inhabitants of Antioch; it appears that the two paſſages in queſtion may be eaſily reconciled, by ſuppoſing that the opinion of the Father had varied a little, on a ſubject on which he does not ſpeak with abſolute certainty; or that, when he called the Chriſtians a hundred thouſand, he uſed round numbers, falling a little ſhort of the accurate reality.

What, then, is the whole information afforded by this ancient writer upon the ſubject? Is it not obviouſly and ſimply this—That in the city of Antioch, containing two hundred thouſand inhabitants, the Chriſtians formed the majority, or at leaſt the one half of the whole population? The only preciſe ground, mentioned by Mr Gibbon, for his own calculation of the inhabitants of Antioch, is the deſtruction of two hundred

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hundred and fifty thousand people in that city by an earthquake, in the time of the elder Justin. But, does this circumstance rest on good authority? Are not calamities of this kind liable to great aggravations from report? A century and a half elapsed from the time of Chrysostom to that of Justin; during which period, the population of this city might have undergone great alteration, and acquired great increase. It is possible to suppose, that at the time of the earthquake, occasional circumstances may have crowded the city with a number of people far exceeding its ordinary population. Although, however, there appears no good ground for discrediting the computation of the ancient Father; yet I own that it may possibly have partaken of that inaccuracy to which such computations are liable. But, then, if it be urged, on the one hand, that he underrated

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rated the whole population; ſhall it not be urged too, on the other hand, that he alſo underrated the number of Chriſtians; eſpecially ſince he does not uſe the phraſe, δεκα μυριαδες, or a hundred thouſand, poſitively; and, ſtill more, ſince he calls the Chriſtians the majority? I rather imagine, alſo, that among us, the poor who are regularly maintained by the church, do not exceed a fortieth, a fiftieth, or ſixtieth part of the whole people; and if a proportion like this held at Antioch, the number of three thouſand poor, mentioned by Chryſoſtom as maintained by the church, would infer the whole number of Chriſtians to have much exceeded his ſtatement. He might miſtake the whole number; he would not ſo readily miſtake the number of thoſe who derived their ſubſiſtence from public charity.

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This laſt obſervation applies alſo to the caſe of the church of Rome; which ſupported one thouſand five hundred poor; and which, of courſe, according to the proportion now ſuggeſted, would, of all claſſes, contain many more than fifty thouſand.

PRO-

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PROPOSITION V.

THAT ALL WHO, IN THE FIRST AGE, PROFESSED CHRISTIANITY, ARE TO BE CONSIDERED, OF COURSE, AS PROFESSING A BELIEF IN THE TRUTH OF ITS MIRACLES.

THIS propoſition is very evident, and will require but a ſhort illuſtration. Miracles were the profeſſed ſigns of an Apoſtle. "Believe me," ſaid Jeſus, "for the works ſake." If, then, thoſe works on which Jeſus and his Apoſtles founded their title to credit, were never

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done; if the apparent miracles were the fabrication of impoſture, Chriſtianity was a fable. Had Jeſus and his Apoſtles not profeſſed to work miracles; had they declined, like the Arabian prophet, to produce thoſe pledges of their miſſion; they might have claimed, and have received belief, on other grounds. But, ſince this was the point on which they grounded their title to credit, it was abſolutely neceſſary that this point ſhould ſtand. The detection of impoſture, here, deſtroyed the poſſibility of believing Chriſtianity. The truth of Chriſtianity, and that of the miracles, were two points, of which, both muſt be received, or neither. To ſay, that you believed Chriſtianity, and and yet that you denied the truth of the miracles, were to ſay, that you were a Chriſtian, and yet that you were not.

I do not, in this propoſition, conſider whether the firſt profeſſing Chriſtians could be

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be insincere in their profession, or mistaken in their belief. But, what I here assert, is, that whether their profession were sincere, or not; whether it were well-founded, or not; it must have embraced both points, the truth of Christianity and the truth of the miracles together. Together they must have gone; and both must have been received, or both rejected. All, therefore, who are handed down to us as having professed Christianity, appear with this testimony inscribed upon their foreheads, "I believe that Jesus and "his Apostles have wrought true mira-"cles." Does a man tell us, that a house is standing; it is implied in his words, that the foundation remains secure. Does he tell us, that a ship in a storm lies safe at anchor; it is implied in his words, that the cable which fastens her remains unbroken. If, then, we had in our hands an original paper, in which

all who profeſſed Chriſtianity ſubſcribed their perſuaſion of the truth of the miracles, we would not have had any more evidence of their profeſſing to poſſeſs this perſuaſion, than we have from ſimply knowing that they profeſſed Chriſtianity. Such a paper as I have ſuppoſed, might have been important in letting us know who were Chriſtians, and what were their numbers; but, farther than this, it would in fact have conveyed no information: It would have been a ſubſcription to an identical propoſition. If any man allowed himſelf to be called a Chriſtian, profeſſing to hold that religion; he needed not to be at the trouble of ſaying that he profeſſed to believe the reality of the miracles on which Chriſtianity was founded, and without the reality of which, ſuppoſed, the belief of Chriſtianity was impoſſible.

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PROPOSITION VI.

THAT THOSE WHO, IN THE FIRST AGE, PROFESSED CHRISTIANITY, ARE CREDIBLE WITNESSES TO THE TRUTH OF ITS MIRACLES; IT BEING IMPOSSIBLE, EITHER THAT THEY SHOULD ENTERTAIN A BELIEF IN THOSE MIRACLES WHICH WAS ILL-FOUNDED, OR THAT THEY SHOULD MAKE A PROFESSION OF BELIEF WHICH WAS INSINCERE.

THE miracles of Chriſtianity were performed in open day, in public places of reſort, in innumerable multitudes. It was not to the report of the Apoſtles that men were obliged to truſt. Thoſe preachers

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ers did not merely relate marvellous accounts of viſions, of journeys to the Heavens, of wonders to which they themſelves were the only pretended witneſſes: They did not relate—they exhibited their miracles. It was to a lame man, who had been accuſtomed to ſit at one of the gates of the Temple, the place perhaps of the moſt public reſort in the Jewiſh metropolis, that Peter and John ſaid, "In "the name of Jeſus of Nazareth, riſe "up and walk." All the world had ſeen him lame; and all, who choſe, might now ſee him ſound and walking.

It is not merely by thoſe who are preſent on the ſpot, who are eye-witneſſes, that a fact of this kind may be atteſted: It becomes a matter of public notoriety; with reſpect to the truth or falſehood of which, all the people living in that age have the means of obtaining certain knowledge.

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knowledge. The great battle of the firſt of Auguſt, fought between the French and Engliſh fleets at the mouth of the Nile, was witneſſed by none of the inhabitants of Europe, excepting the combatants themſelves; yet every man in Europe can atteſt the indubitable certainty of that important fact. Were a miracle, ſimilar to that above mentioned, to take place in London; were a man, who had been for ſome time lying lame at the entry to the Houſe of Commons, to be, by a word, made perfectly whole; what would happen? The extraordinary event would, at the firſt report of it, be believed by ſome, doubted by others, and by others totally diſcredited: But the univerſal communication with the metropolis, would ſoon make the real ſtate of the caſe notorious throughout the iſland. The miracles of Chriſtianity were open facts, performed in the face of multitudes; their

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their effects were visible and permanent; and the whole generation then living were competent judges of their truth; or rather, they were facts which required no exercise of judgement at all, and with respect to which there could be only one opinion.

When things of this public and extraordinary nature are first reported, they may admit of doubt with those who have not been eye-witnesses. It is reported, at the time I now write *, that Buonaparte, the French General, is killed in Egypt. This event admits now of doubt; but the possibility of mistake or of doubt, with regard to it, will some time hereafter be totally removed. When Jesus and his Apostles professed to restore, in innumerable instances, in various places, and in the most public manner, sight to the incurably blind,

* December 1798, or near that time.

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blind, the power of walking to the incurably lame, health to the incurably diſeaſed, and life to the dead; theſe were facts of ſuch a kind, that their truth could, by a great part of mankind, be aſcertained through the teſtimony of their own ſenſes; and they were facts ſo important, ſo extraordinary, and ſo public, that the true ſtate of the caſe muſt have been notorious to all the world; as well to thoſe who had not themſelves beheld them, as to thoſe who had. Suppoſing the report of the French General's death to be true, the inhabitants of Britain will ſoon become as certain of the fact as if they had ſeen the bullet enter his body. To theſe public and notorious facts, all the people, living in the age in which they happen, are witneſſes moſt fully competent. Nor, in the caſe of ſuch witneſſes, is there any need to be at pains in examining their judgement, their prejudices, or the attention

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tion they have beſtowed on the ſubjects of their teſtimony. It matters little, in thoſe caſes, whether the event be to the witneſs in the higheſt degree deſirable, or the object of his moſt violent averſion: It matters little, whether the witneſs himſelf be a man of ſound and cautious judgement, or of weak underſtanding and blind credulity. The notoriety of the fact ſweeps away all theſe diſtinctions; and there is one opinion among the moſt credulous, and the moſt ſceptical; among thoſe who are moſt prone, and thoſe who are moſt averſe to believe.

But although, in notorious caſes, the character and diſpoſitions of the witneſs are of little conſequence, ſince all are compelled, by the publicity, to hold one opinion, and one language; yet am I not, in the preſent inſtance, under the neceſſity of taking that advantage which the

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the nature of the case I am considering would afford me. The first Christians were witnesses to the truth of the Christian miracles, of the most unexceptionable kind: There was every motive to prevent, and no motive to induce, their profession of faith in the miracles, except on the ground of the firmest and most cautiously acquired conviction of their truth. Their situation, and the circumstances of the case, were such as to secure, in this instance, the caution of the most credulous, and the sincerity of the most deceitful. Let us proceed, then, to consider their situation, and the circumstances of the case.

The enemies of Christianity declaim on the love of wonder which is inherent in the human mind; on the ready reception which the vulgar give to all extraordinary stories; on the multitude of

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ſuch ſtories, entirely groundleſs, which have been in every age and country circulated and believed. Let all this be allowed in its utmoſt extent. When men can hear a wonderful ſtory, believe it, and ſit ſtill; their credulity may, in ſuch caſes perhaps, take ſide with their love of wonder, and lead them to grant a careleſs, unexamining aſſent. But if you aſk them, on the faith of your ſtory, to renounce the religion of their youth, their fathers, their country, and take a new one from the mouths of ſtrangers; if you aſk them, on the faith of your ſtory, to change their ſyſtem of belief, their train of thought, their plan of life; if you aſk them, on the faith of your ſtory, to renounce their long-formed habits of intemperance, of avarice, and of prodigality: Are theſe, ſteps that will be taken on the faith of an unexamined report? Will not requiſitions like theſe, arreſt

arreſt ſome attention, and prompt ſome inquiry? Can any perſon, that chooſes to tell a wonderful ſtory, obtain the command of the principles and conduct of his fellow men?

It may poſſibly be alleged by the enemies of Chriſtianity, that the firſt converts had other imagined grounds, on which they reſted their faith in Chriſtianity; and that, therefore, the truth or falſehood of the miracles was, to them, an object of inferior concern. Now, even ſuppoſing it to have been the caſe, that the faith of the firſt converts did not reſt upon miracles as its eſſential foundation, but poſſeſſed, independent of them, other ſufficient grounds; ſtill, the miracles could not fail to be the ſubjects of their deep intereſt, and of their anxious attention. But, is it reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the miracles were not an eſſential ground, on

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which the preachers of Chriſtianity claimed the faith of their hearers? Does not the New Teſtament clearly refer to them as the grounds of faith, and call upon men to believe for the work's ſake? And is it not very plain, that thoſe who accuſe the firſt preachers, of impoſture, cannot, with any reaſon, pretend, that the miracles were matters of little importance, and attractive of little intereſt? For why, if it were ſo, did the Apoſtles forge them? It was not ſurely, at leaſt, an eaſy, nor a ſafe matter, to conduct a ſyſtem of fictitious miracles. If ſuch a plan were, as ſeems abſurd to ſuppoſe, practicable at all, it certainly was a plan overwhelmed with difficulties, and pregnant with danger: It was a plan, which, the importunities of thoſe around him, could not prevail on the Arabian *impoſtor* to attempt: It was a plan, the ſeemingly unavoidable detection of which, muſt viſibly

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viſibly have threatened deſtruction to the cauſe in aid of which it was unwiſely fabricated. It ſeems indeed indubitable, on ſuppoſition of the inſincerity of the Apoſtles, that thoſe ableſt of impoſtors would never have incumbered their ſcheme with forgeries ſo pregnant with apparently inevitable danger, except the neceſſity of producing pretended miracles had been imperious and indiſpenſable; except ſuch miracles had been regarded as the ſubſtratum of Chriſtianity—eſſential to the ſupport of the fabric which it was their object to erect.

Mr Gibbon is deſirous of repreſenting the world as having been at this time prepared for a change of religion. He ſays, that ſcepticiſm had been diſſeminated from the higher orders, throughout the whole maſs of ſociety; that this being a ſtate of mind in which the bulk of

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mankind cannot endure to continue, the world, eſtranged from its old principles of religion, was ready to adopt, with avidity, any new ones that ſhould be offered; that at this happy and extraordinary criſis, juſt when the world were in want of a religion, Chriſtianity aroſe—was received, of courſe, with eager welcome—and entered, without oppoſition or difficulty, that place in the human mind, which the departure of the ancient ſuperſtitions had opportunely left vacant *. In the paſſage which contains this idea, you will look in vain for any reference to authorities. The idea is, of courſe, a conjecture of Mr Gibbon's own fabrication; and every reader is at liberty to judge of its probability. Let us examine it.—According, then, to Mr Gibbon's own principles, the criſis which he ſuppoſes, will be found exiſting rarely. It is

* Vol. I. ch. 15. p. 503, 504, 505. 2d Ed.

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is a ſtate, he ſays, in which the bulk of mankind cannot endure to find themſelves. It is a ſtate, of courſe, in which they will probably be ſeldom found; and this unfrequency and unlikelihood of ſuch a ſtate of matters exiſting, will make us more ſcrupulous in inquiring for the grounds on which it is ſuppoſed to have exiſted at the commencement of the Chriſtian æra.

Endeavouring to explain the manner in which the multitude were now forcibly awakened from the pleaſing viſion of ſuperſtition, Mr Gibbon ſuppoſes that the prevailing ſcepticiſm began with the philoſophers and men of rank, and that it was from them communicated to the other orders of the ſtate. Now, grant, for the preſent, the exiſtence of this ſcepticiſm among the learned and higher orders; the queſtion remains, How

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was this ſcepticiſm communicated from them to the maſs of ſociety? Mr Gibbon is aware, that it could not be by means of the moſt powerful engine of communication, ſceptical writings, which, at a time when printing was unknown, the bulk of the people could neither procure, nor read; and he remarks, prudently, that the contagion of the ſceptical writings, then exiſting, had been diffuſed far beyond the number of their readers.— But, how diffuſed? We know well, that the men of rank, whatever their own principles might be, took a deep intereſt in the ſupport of the public religion. They performed, themſelves, its ſolemn rites; and if they did laugh in ſecret at the abſurdities with which it was replete, they certainly would endeavour to conceal their ſentiments. When they returned from preſiding at the public ſolemnities, in which, by hypocritical

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ſhow, they ſtrove to impreſs a religious reſpect, to which their own breaſts were ſtrangers; they would not be ſo idle, inconſiſtent, and abſurd, as, according to Mr Gibbon's ſuppoſition, to inform their menial ſervants, who attended them at table, that it was all a farce. If they could not refrain from indulging their mirth at the expence of thoſe ſuperſtitions to which they led the way—of thoſe pontifical robes in which they had themſelves been arrayed; they ſurely would wait, at leaſt, till the attendants at table were withdrawn; nor would they wantonly diſſipate the effects of their hypocriſy, and of the labour which it coſt them.

Since, then, the men of rank, if they were ſceptics themſelves, did certainly labour to impreſs oppoſite ſentiments upon the minds of the people, and took

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a deep intereſt in the ſupport of the eſtabliſhed ſuperſtitions; by what means could the ſcepticiſm, ſuppoſed to have been prevalent among them, extend itſelf to infect the maſs of ſociety?—But, why ſhould I be at much pains in diſproving the ſuppoſition of Mr Gibbon? The reader need only turn back to the Second Chapter of his Hiſtory, where he will find it remarked, in ſo many words, that *all* the various modes of Pagan worſhip were regarded by the people as equally true. They had not, if this remark be juſt, an idea of ſuch a thing as falſehood in religion. They did not content themſelves with ſelecting one from the various modes of worſhip, to which they might excluſively attach their faith: but, ſo complete, ſo unmingled was their credulity, that it embraced them all. Were thoſe the people, whom the prevalence of ſcepticiſm had eſtranged from their ancient

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ancient superstitions, and prepared for the reception of any new faith?

With respect to the prevalence of scepticism among the higher orders in the Roman Empire, Mr Gibbon's observations will be generally, perhaps, esteemed just. Perhaps they are. At the same time, there is one circumstance which suggests to my mind some doubt of their justice, and leads me to think it not improbable, that a fuller search into the sentiments of antiquity, might rather tend to disprove them. The circumstance to which I allude, is the manner in which religion is mentioned in the correspondence between Pliny and the Emperor Trajan. Pliny, at least, united the characters of a philosopher and a statesman; and where shall you expect to find the supposed fashionable incredulity, if not in men whose rank was highest in the State, and whose strong philosophic minds will be

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be eſteemed the moſt likely to have riſen ſuperior to vulgar prejudice? Yet, examine the correſpondence that paſſed between thoſe two eminent men, and you will read the language of ſincere religionists. If thoſe letters were written with a view to their meeting the public eye, this language may then be ſuppoſed to have been only of a piece with the farce that was regularly acted. But if they were written without any ſuch view, they then contain an exhibition of the private ſentiments of thoſe eminent men, ſuch as may infuſe ſome doubt with reſpect to the ſuppoſed prevalence of ſcepticiſm among the higher orders of the Roman Empire.

It is remarked by Paley, that ſcepticiſm, while it effaces from the mind its former principles of religion, does by no means tend to diſpoſe it towards the reception of a new faith, but rather creates

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creates a diſregard for all religion whatever.

For the ſake of proving the looſe hold which Paganiſm poſſeſſed of the minds of its votaries, Mr Gibbon remarks, that its rites and principles were not ſupported by a ſet of men ſecluded from the purſuits of the world, and fit for diffuſing the zeal with which an entire devotion to religion filled their own breaſts; but by a ſet of men, who enjoyed the dignities, and executed the buſineſs of the State; whoſe habits and feelings were not clerical, and who, with cold indifference, performed the accuſtomed rites. There were few, he ſays, who derived their whole credit and ſupport from the ſacerdotal profeſſion. I take it for granted, that the fact here is rightly ſtated. It is ſo, for any thing that I know. With reſpect to the remark which Mr Gibbon would

found on it; it is no doubt true, that in every employment, civil and ſacred, you are to expect the greateſt zeal from thoſe whoſe time, ſtudies, and exertions, are excluſively devoted to that one employment. But, in the preſent caſe, it is to be remembered, that the other character borne by thoſe miniſters of Paganiſm, who were not thorough prieſts, was that of ſtateſmen: And, in a government, where religion was a grand engine of State, the feelings of a ſtateſman-prieſt, might not perhaps be leſs favourable to religious zeal, than thoſe of a mere prieſt. If the Pagan prieſthood had been deficient in point of zeal, that deficiency might have been perhaps amply compenſated, by the authority, and influence, and ſplendour, which attached to them, and by which, the minds of the admiring multitude were dazzled and overawed. Where the Emperor was the pontifex maximus; where the

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the offices of the prieſthood were performed, in perſon, by the nobles, the ſenators, the governors of provinces; there was an external luſtre thrown around religion, moſt dazzling to the vulgar eye; and the religious regards of mankind were enlivened and confirmed by the profound civil reſpect with which they beheld its illuſtrious miniſters. Muſt not the authority and ſplendour which the Pagan prieſts derived from their elevated rank, have conferred upon them a degree of influence, which the more ardent, perhaps, but impotent zeal of poor and private men, will in vain attempt to rival?

Mr Gibbon remarks, that the genius of Polytheiſm was not ſuch, as ſtrongly to attach the affections of its votaries. A ſimilar remark is made by a very *profound obſerver* of human nature *; and it is, very

* Monteſquieu.

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probably, founded in truth. But then, it is remarked by this ſame profound writer, that men are extremely addicted to idolatry, and leſs to ideas of a ſpiritual kind. To the truth of this latter obſervation, the hiſtory of the world bears ample teſtimony. It is well known, how wide and prevalent the dominion of idolatry has been. Debarred as the Jews were, by ſtatutes the moſt rigorous, from every thing approaching the worſhip of their neighbours; it is well known how prone they were to adopt that idolatrous worſhip. It is well known, that, even in the heart of the Chriſtian church, idolatry erected its ſtandard; and, during ſome ages of darkneſs, aſſimilated Popiſh to Pagan Rome.

The ſtate of the caſe, then, ſeems to be this. The genius of Paganiſm, attaching looſely the affections of its votaries,

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ries, might ill diſpoſe men for enduring, in its cauſe, perſecution. Had it been the Emperor who required a renunciation of the ancient faith; had he threatened that the weight of his power ſhould fall on thoſe who diſobeyed the ſummons; had apoſtaſy been bribed by the allurements of Imperial power: it might then, perhaps, have been expected, that Paganiſm, leſs capable of attaching its votaries, would have more eaſily ſunk beneath the ſhock of perſecution, and have more readily ſuſtained a general deſertion. But though the incapacity of Paganiſm to attach ſtrongly its votaries, might make it more readily ſink beneath perſecution; yet, would this incapacity, worldly motives being out of the queſtion, lead men to renounce that idolatry, to which they have always ſhewn themſelves prone, for the ſake of a ſpiritual religion to which they have always ſhewn themſelves averſe?

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Perſecution, perhaps, may more eaſily detach men from idolatry; but a ſpiritual religion, to which they have always appeared indiſpoſed, will it, of itſelf, poſſeſs the power to detach men from that idolatry to which they have always appeared inclined?

There were worldly reaſons, of the ſtrongeſt kind, to arouſe the caution of thoſe who thought of adopting Chriſtianity, and prevent them from taking that ſtep raſhly. They were expoſed to all the contumely, ſcorn, and vaſt variety of private perſecution, which the reſentment of thoſe who adhered to the ancient faith would naturally produce. We may conceive the odium which attached itſelf to thoſe who forſook the religion of the State, from the language employed on this ſubject by Tacitus.

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If there be a man in antiquity, whom modern ſceptics would ſelect as their great forerunner, with a mind exaltedly ſuperior to all the prejudices of religion; that man would be the cool, philoſophic, and profound hiſtorian, whoſe writings are, in Mr Gibbon's phraſe, to inſtruct the laſt generations of mankind. Yet, hear this ſame Tacitus, when he comes to ſpeak of a renunciation of the eſtabliſhed religion. The acrimony of his expreſſion would ſuit the temper of the moſt inflamed bigot. In ſpeaking of thoſe who became proſelytes to Judaiſm, he ſays, "Quiſque peſſimus, ſpretis religionibus "patriis*," &c. It is well known, that thoſe who pay ſo much attention to religious ſubjects, as to make a change in their faith and worſhip, are not, always at leaſt, the moſt abandoned of men; and it is pretty evident, that the clauſe, *ſpretis*

* Hiſt. V. 5.

ſpretis religionibus patriis, contains the crime, of which the Jewiſh converts had been guilty, and which rendered them, in the eyes of the hiſtorian, the moſt abandoned of mankind. "Tranſgreſſi," ſays he, ſpeaking on the ſame ſubject, "tranſgreſſi in mores eorum non quid-"quam prius imbuuntur, quam contem-"nere deos, exuere patriam †." The renunciation of his country's religion, and the renunciation of his country, are eſteemed kindred crimes; crimes, which excited in the breaſt of a Roman, all the indignation that ſuperſtition and imagined patriotiſm could, conjoined, inflame. On this important ſubject, the philoſopher, the ſtateſman, and the multitude, had one ſentiment: and, amidſt thoſe tumultuous clamours, which the reſcript of Adrian mentions as directed againſt the Chriſtians, you hear the mingled voice of

† Hiſt. V. 5.

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of Tacitus, employing an acrimony and violence of expreſſion, which the rage of the bigotted multitude could not eaſily ſurpaſs.

Thoſe ſentiments did not expreſs themſelves merely in violent language, in popular clamour, and in mobbiſh commotions. The hand of the civil power was armed againſt the defenceleſs Chriſtians; and thoſe abhorred deſerters of religion were committed to the priſons, and to the flames.

At preſent, (it is remarked by Mr Gibbon), a criminal may avoid, by flight, the reſentment of the Government; and may find, in other countries, a ſhelter from the power that rules his own. But in thoſe times, the vaſt extent of the Empire rendered eſcape from it, greatly, at leaſt more difficult; and, beyond the diſtant confines

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fines of the Empire, if they ſhould be reached, there lay inhoſpitable deſarts, rude barbarians, and feebler powers, who durſt not reſiſt the Emperor's command, nor refuſe to reſign his fugitive ſubjects. The Imperial arm was wielded with deſpotic ſway; and, when it had marked its victims, it was alike vain to think of reſiſtance, or of flight.

When men became Chriſtians, they united the world in enmity againſt them. Wherever they directed their hopeleſs eye, they beheld only indignation and hoſtility. Superſtition abhorred them as contemners of the gods; patriotiſm branded them as renouncers of their country, and haters of mankind. The unequalled innocence and integrity which marked their manners, ſaved them not from the venomous tongue of calumny; their principles and their lives were ſhockingly miſrepreſented; and they were accuſed as evil-doers.

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Their families, their friends, their acquaintances, reproached, derided, and diſowned them. They were mobbed by the populace; they were impriſoned, and committed to the flames, by the public authority. A cauſe which the Government perſecutes, may ſometimes poſſeſs a ſhare of popularity; a cauſe which is the object of popular rage, may meet the protection of the State. But, without the pale of the church, the Chriſtians looked in vain for friends. All orders were united againſt this upſtart Jewiſh ſect, whoſe audacity appeared unprecedented and incredible. The world was not, as now, accuſtomed to an oppoſition of religious opinions, the *zeal* of *proſelytiſm*, and the claims of truth. It was with aſtoniſhment and indignation, that the Roman world beheld a few men, unknown, bring forward, throughout the extent of their dominions—What? It was not

not a new ſyſtem of Polytheiſm, which they wiſhed to incorporate with the eſtabliſhed religion, and for the gods of which they claimed a place in the capitol. This had been accounted a claim by far too preſumptuous, to proceed from private and obſcure individuals, unſupported, nay oppoſed, by the rulers of their native province. But this was not the claim which the Apoſtles advanced. Their claim was infinitely more daring. They brought forward a religion, which they ſaid, was the only true one, the only one which men ought to hold; a religion, which diſdained all alliance, which ſought to reign alone, or not at all; and aſpired to erect its ſtandard on the ruins of the religion of the Empire. The Apoſtles told the proud Romans, that *all*, which they and their anceſtors had, from time immemorial, eſteemed ſacred; that religion, under which the Empire had riſen

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to greatneſs; that religion, at the ſolemn rites of which, the Emperor and his great officers of State preſided; that that religion was abſurdity and folly.

Let us next inquire, if there were any motives, within the church itſelf, which, independent of the truth of the miracles, and without regard to it, might influence the belief and profeſſion of the firſt Chriſtians. There is one ſuggeſted by Mr Gibbon. It is, the liberal charity with which the Chriſtian church relieved the wants of the poor; which had an obvious tendency to draw around them that unfortunate portion of our race, whom age, infirmity, and ſickneſs, have reduced to dependence on their happier brethren. The force of this obſervation, I allow. I allow, that all which virtue could do, to multiply the numbers of the church, was done. I am diſpoſed to think, that

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benevolence, in its various forms, did eminently diſtinguiſh the firſt diſciples of Jeſus. They fed the hungry; they clothed the naked; they viſited the ſick, and thoſe in priſon. The ſon of affliction, found that his lonely dwelling, and the retirement of his ſorrows, did not ſeclude him from Chriſtian attentions. The diſtreſſed found compaſſion; the proſperous ſympathetic joy. The ſtranger found a cordial welcome; the lowly found condeſcenſion; the great, ſubmiſſion and reſpect. Their inſulters and oppreſſors heard them, with aſtoniſhment, offer up prayers for their welfare; and received a return of good, for the evil they had done. It was within the pale of the Chriſtian Church, that all the virtues which bleſs human ſociety reſided; and exhibited a luſtre and perfection, bright and unrivalled. "See," ſaid the Heathens, "how theſe Chriſtians love one "another!"

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" another!" I will not deny, that the virtues of the Primitive Church muſt have formed an attractive force in its favour. But, though the pure and admirable morality which Chriſtianity introduced into the world, might, in ſome reſpects, tend to promote, it would, in other, and thoſe perhaps more important reſpects, tend to hinder its reception.

The liberal charity which the Chriſtians practiſed, might allure indeed the poor to their ſociety; but it would have an oppoſite effect upon the rich, by whom that charity was to be diſpenſed. The Apoſtles did not gather money in the ſtreets; it was, of courſe, from the converts themſelves, that the Chriſtian charity was derived; and therefore, in whatever degree it made the poor more ready to enter the church, it would, in the ſame degree, make the rich more cauti-

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ous and ſcrupulous; more inquiſitive about the grounds on which they parted with their property. The money, therefore, that was given in charity, acted with equal force in oppoſite directions; and, as oppoſite forces deſtroy each other, it will not fall to be accounted either an attracting or repelling power; either as favouring, or oppoſing, the progreſs of Chriſtianity.

In general, the morality which Chriſtianity firmly enjoined, muſt have excited, againſt this pure religion, all the oppoſition which the corrupt deſires of mens hearts could raiſe. It is true, that virtue conſtitutes the happineſs of man; but it is alſo true, that man's heart, at once fooliſh and wicked, diſcovers a ſtrong reluctance to hearken to its ſalutary admonitions. It is too true, that when the habits of vice are formed and rivetted by cuſtom,

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cuſtom, there is nothing to which the heart bears a more violent and determined reluctance, than the thought of a renovation of manners. It is in vain that you tell a man, addicted to the exceſſive uſe of intoxicating liquors, that they are waſting his ſpirits, his ſtrength, and his property, and carrying him faſt to his grave: He ſees, perhaps, the force of your obſervations; but he perſiſts, notwithſtanding, to gratify his appetite, and ruin the hope of his life. Heedleſs of the miſery, of which experience has given him melancholy evidence, a wicked man hugs his vices; and you cannot more effectually inflame his keen reſentment, than by adviſing him to think of his circumſtances, his reputation and his health. The corrupted religion of Paganiſm, aided perhaps by other circumſtances, had ſunk mankind in the deep lethargy of vice; and men, in this condition, would ill

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brook the firm and threatening tone in which Chriſtianity called them, at their peril, to renounce their vices. It was not merely the perſecution and reproach of an unbelieving world, that oppoſed the reception of Chriſtianity: A principle of oppoſition lay deep, in the corruption of the human heart and conduct. Every vice to which a man had been addicted, pled powerfully the cauſe of Paganiſm; and would render him cautious, ſcrupulous and reluctant, about embracing, in its ſtead, the holy faith of Jeſus. It was not the mere ſound of a wandering, unexamined ſtory, that would make the avaricious, liberal; the intemperate, ſober; the revengeful, forgiving; the cruel, kind; the furious, gentle; and the thief, an honeſt man. Although it may be allowed, that virtue does poſſeſs charms, and an attractive power, to which even corrupt men may not be entirely inſenſible, and which might,

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might, in different ways, be of ſervice to the cauſe of Chriſtianity; yet it muſt be admitted, that, in the corrupted age in which Chriſtianity appeared, the pure, unaccommodating genius of its morality muſt have tended, in a much higher degree, to revolt, than to reconcile, the regards of men. The Goſpel, while it called men, on the pain of awful puniſhments, to be juſt, pure, temperate, and forgiving, would find an internal oppoſition to its reception, not perhaps leſs powerful, than that which was created by the general ſcorn and reproach, by the fury of the populace, and the perſecution of the civil power.

The circumſtances which I have mentioned, are very probably ſufficient for proving, that the Goſpel could not have made its way in the world, without ſome kind of ſupernatural means. It ſeems totally

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tally out of probability to ſuppoſe, that a few men, private, poor, moſt of them untaught, ſhould be able to ſtruggle, with ſucceſs, againſt the clerical and civil powers; and to create, by the mere exertions of an impotent zeal, ſuch a mighty revolution of faith and manners. Without the ſuppoſition of ſomething ſupernatural, there are no adequate cauſes for the known and ſtupendous effects. The caſe is not analogous to any thing that the world ever ſaw. Experience affords us no grounds for concluding, that the effects could be produced by thoſe natural means which exiſted in the caſe. Suppoſing, therefore, that we had not heard any thing concerning miracles, we might, from the want of other adequate cauſes, have had ſome ground for preſuming, that ſome ſupernatural powers, either viſible or ſecret, muſt have been preſent,

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to give effect to the otherwiſe unregarded words of the Apoſtles.

But I requeſt the particular attention of the reader to the following obſervation. It is, that the argument which I am purſuing, does not by any means oblige me to prove, that Chriſtianity could not have been propagated without ſupernatural means. This is not, in my opinion, in any degree, the moſt important point on which the evidence that may be derived from the ſucceſs of Chriſtianity bears. It is not, in any degree, the main uſe to which the facts reſpecting the ſucceſs of Chriſtianity ought to be applied. Had the Apoſtles, like Mahomet, pretended only to ſecret viſitations, and to miracles inviſible to mortal eye, it might then have been neceſſary to prove, with reſpect to the ſucceſs of their preaching, what the Arabian impoſtor pretended with reſpect

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to that of his arms, that it was miraculous, and not to be accounted for from natural cauſes. But when other miracles are advanced, the queſtion, then, is not, whether the propagation was itſelf a miracle; but, whether it affords us ſuch a number of credible witneſſes, as to aſſure us of the reality of the other miracles which were profeſſed to be wrought. Allow that the Apoſtles could have done what they did, by means of their zeal, their fortitude, their activity, their unwearied perſeverance; allow it, impoſſible as it ſeems to be: Yet the pretext to work miracles, for which they did not poſſeſs powers from Heaven, would have baffled a ſcheme that had been otherwiſe practicable. A man, whom their zeal and feigned profeſſion might have deceived, whom they might have allured to their ſtandard, had they kept their pretended miracles behind the curtain, and beyond the

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the reach of detection; this man could not ſhut his eyes on thoſe diſcoveries of forgery, which, in profeſſing to work miracles, the imprudence of the preachers had laid within the reach of all the world. The queſtion is not, now, whether the propagation were, or were not, poſſible from natural cauſes; but, whether the miracles which we know to have been profeſſed, could, or could not, eſcape detection. It is not, whether the firſt converts could, or could not have been perſuaded to become ſuch, without ſupernatural means; but, whether they could, or could not have been ignorant of the forgery of the pretended miracles, in caſe ſuch forgery had exiſted. It were perfectly poſſible to ſuppoſe, that the firſt converts could have been brought to adopt Chriſtianity without ſupernatural means; while yet it might be impoſſible to ſuppoſe, that they could be ignorant with reſpect

ſpect to the truth or falſehood of the miracles which were profeſſed. I requeſt that the diſtinction which I have been labouring to impreſs upon the reader's mind, may be attended to.

If the evidence, ſtated above, had been wanting; if it had been poſſible to aver, that the firſt converts muſt have been diſpoſed to adopt the Chriſtian faith with blind and implicit eagerneſs, and to ſwallow, if need were, for its ſake, with unreſiſting credulity, every *poſſible* contradiction and abſurdity: ſtill, I would maintain, that they are credible witneſſes. There are ſome things on which you will not be allowed to ſhut your eyes, however great may be your diſpoſition.

I have already remarked, that from the number, openneſs, and palpability of the profeſſed miracles, no degree of inattention,

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tention, or of disposition to believe, could be sufficient to blind the first Christians in regard to them. I will now call the attention of the reader to another most potent cause, co-operating (if any co-operation were necessary) with the openness and and palpability of the facts, in preventing the possibility of the first Christians being mistaken.

Christianity was surrounded, on every hand, by numerous, powerful, and zealous enemies, who would examine the case with the eager eye of malice, and who, with triumph, would have dunned into the ears of the converts any discovery of falsehood. However disposed the Christian converts had been to keep their eyes bound up from the unwelcome sight of forgery, the enemies of the religion would have torn away the bandage by violence, and have compelled the unwill-

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ing slaves of credulity to look at the case as it stood.

In Judea, and throughout the world, the priests, the statesmen, the people, were enemies to the Christian faith. The Apostles and their followers were threatened, beaten, imprisoned, committed to the flames. The Jewish and the Pagan interests, opposite in other things, were at one here; and they directed their united efforts, their united rage, injustice and cruelty, towards the extinction of the rising cause.—But they spent in vain those ineffectual efforts.—Christianity flourished, diffused itself, and reared high its head, from beneath their attempts to destroy it. There was, however, a method, the adoption of which, had it been possible, would have given them a complete, an easy triumph; and have involved the Christian cause in certain, final, merited ruin. Could

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that method have been adopted, the ſword of intolerance needed not have been unſheathed; the ſtateſmen and the prieſts might have ſitten at peace; the foundations of the temples had not been ſhaken, nor the ſtatues of the gods tumbled from their baſes. Could that method have been adopted, the temples had not been deſerted, the ſacrifices had not wanted purchaſers, nor the rites of ancient times have been abandoned, at the call of obſcure and impotent innovators. Could that method have been adopted, we ſhould not perhaps have heard of Chriſtianity; and thoſe renowned Apoſtolic names, to which the Chriſtian world looks with reverence, would have died in oblivion, or have been tranſmitted to deſerved infamy. Could the Phariſees have ſhewn, to the ſatisfaction of mens minds, that Lazarus had never been dead; that the man born blind, whom they queſtioned with

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ſuch ſeverity, and ſo little effect, had never wanted the uſe of ſight; that the lame man, cured by Peter and John, had never wanted the uſe of his limbs:—That had been enough—that had been an effectual antidote to the growing deſertion of the ancient faith—that had been the death's wound to the hated and dreaded cauſe of Chriſtianity. If keen inveſtigation, or influence, or money, could have obtained thoſe important diſcoveries, they would have been obtained. The cauſe of Chriſtianity, hated, was not deſpiſed. Its enemies were not the ignorant, poor, and weak: They were the great, the powerful, the rich, the learned: Its pretenſions were ſubjected to the cloſe inſpection of their eager and deſpiteful eye.

What, then, ſhall we ſay? Shall we ſuppoſe, that Jeſus and his Apoſtles, men without power, without rank, without influence,

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influence, without money, formed a ſyſtem of impoſture—ſo wide, that it overſpread the Roman world; ſo expoſed, that it met the obſervation of every mortal; ſo wiſely, ſo firmly compacted, that it eluded all penetration, defied all aſſault, and triumphed over all authority? Shall we ſuppoſe, that, of all the thouſands, and tens of thouſands, who muſt have been privy to theſe immenſe machinations, there was not one who ever proved faithleſs; not a man, from whoſe breaſt, the love of truth, the wearineſs of conſtraint, the compunctions of conſcience, the deſire of gaining the favour of the great, rich and powerful, could ever draw the profound and important ſecret? Shall we ſuppoſe, that the moſt keen and virulent inveſtigation, ſupported by all the advantages of wealth and power, could never ſucceed in exploring one of the innumerable windings, of which

this mighty syſtem of impoſture muſt have conſiſted; that bribery, intrigues, nor force, could ever penetrate thoſe impervious and deep-laid labyrinths of profound deceit?—What was it, that kept the combination in ſuch indiſſoluble union? What were the motives that preſerved the unconquerable fidelity of the innumerable partizans of this ſtupendous plot? How did the Apoſtles contrive to lodge the ſecret in their breaſts; ſo deep, that no art, nor power, nor money, were able to extract it? Impoſtors, conſpirators, deceivers, unprincipled men, who purſue their deſigns at the expence of truth and virtue; what are the motives by which ſuch men are actuated? Are they not the hopes of wealth, of fame, of power, of eaſe, of pleaſure, of grandeur? Theſe are the coveted objects, the purſuit of which allures deluded men from the ways of innocence and virtue; arms the hand of

of the aſſaſſin; fires the ambition of the conqueror; and fills with guile the tongue of the deceiver. But, where were ſuch motives to bind the fidelity of thoſe who ſupported the Apoſtles and their cauſe? Where was the proſpect of wealth, fame, power, eaſe, pleaſure, grandeur, with which the Apoſtles could flatter the hopes, and bribe the ſecrecy, of their adherents? —they, who were themſelves poor, perſecuted men; buffeted, beaten, impriſoned, derided, purſued by the eternal hatred of the great, rich and powerful. All the goods of this world, all that the vicious ſeek, were in the hands of the enemies of Chriſtianity; and the whole weight of ſuch motives as theſe things afford, preſſed to deſtroy the combination.

The idea, that the miracles profeſſed to be wrought by the preachers of Chriſtianity, were managed by artifice and colluſion,

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colluſion, is big with infinite and matchleſs abſurdity.—Suppoſe that the man mentioned in the 9th chapter of John's Goſpel, and ſaid to have been born blind, had never wanted the uſe of ſight, or had feigned the want of it only for a ſhort time, in order that a pretended miracle might be forged: Is it not plain, beyond every thing, that evidence of this muſt have poured in upon the Phariſees; that hundreds, who had formerly known the man, would have vied with each other, in haſtening to gratify their grandees by a diſcovery of the truth? In order to impoſe upon the world a falſe miracle of this kind, it would have been neceſſary to bribe the concurrence, not merely of the man himſelf, not merely of eight, ten, or twelve abettors of the plot; but it would have been neceſſary to ſecure the colluſion of every individual with whom a man of full age had ever been acquainted, of every individual

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vidual who remembered to have ever ſeen him.—Take the caſe of Jairus's daughter. There is no doubt, that the death of the young woman was not a notorious fact. This pretended miracle might have been concerted with the family of Jairus: But with them it muſt have been concerted. They muſt have been privy to the deceit, and their fidelity muſt have been ſecured.

In general, in a part of the caſes, the miracle was palpable to all the world; and fiction, for the ſhorteſt time, by any means whatever, was impoſſible. It is remarked, with juſtice, that where a religion is eſtabliſhed, its miniſters poſſeſſed of wealth, power, influence, and their aſſertions enforced by inquiſitorial terrors, there may be impoſed upon the public, groſs deceptions, which, in ſituations leſs advantageous, had been impracticable.

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There are, however, deceptions, which no wealth, nor power, nor influence, no advantage of ſituation, can effect.—A man, whom all the world had ſeen, for twenty or thirty years, poſſeſſing the uſe of ſight; the prieſts of Spain, in the zenith of their influence, could not have convinced mankind that that man was born blind. There are ſome of the miracles, profeſſed to be wrought in the cauſe of Chriſtianity, of this kind; ſuch as no bribery, no influence, no artifice, no power, could have falſely impoſed upon the world; ſuch glaring facts, that men might as ſoon have been ignorant of the ſhining of the ſun, as of their falſehood or their truth. There were, indeed, other caſes, where the concurrence of only a few perſons; ſome, perhaps, there might be, where the concurrence of only the patient himſelf, was needed. But, had even all the caſes been of this more

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private kind, the vaſt number of miracles that were profeſſed to be wrought, would have rendered the neceſſary number of abettors immenſely great, and would have removed the poſſibility of ſucceſsful impoſture.

Had the miracles profeſſed to have been wrought, been only ten or twelve in number; had thoſe ten or twelve been all of a private kind, for which the colluſion of twenty, fifty, or at the utmoſt a hundred abettors, had been ſufficient; had the preachers been poſſeſſed of wealth, and had it alſo been poſſible to have ſuppoſed them themſelves intereſted in deceiving mankind; I could then have more readily liſtened to a man who alleged the poſſibility of impoſture. I could have more readily liſtened to him—I do not ſay that I would have agreed with him in opinion. I might have deſired him to recollect,

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recollect, that a ſecret is in little ſafety, when twenty, fifty, or a hundred perſons, muſt unite in keeping it; perſons, who muſt be ſelected, with regard, not to characters, but to circumſtances, indifferently from the male and from the female ſex, from the ſilent and the communicative, from the ſteady and the fickle, from the ſober and the intemperate. Shall it never happen, that, in a moment of diſguſt, of reſentment, of communicativeneſs, of confidential friendſhip, of intoxication, of remorſe, ſome one of the number, leſs ſteady, leſs reſerved, leſs watchful, leſs confirmed in villany than the reſt, ſhall bring forth, from its dark receſſes, the important ſecret? It is well known, how often thoſe plots, the completion of which is confined within a limited and ſhort period, are prematurely diſcovered, and their execution defeated. When the ſecret is entruſted to a number of

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of perſons, profound ſecrecy is not eaſily preſerved for any length of time. But, when the time during which it muſt be preſerved, is your whole life; through every variety of your condition and your ſpirits; when you muſt carry it with you to the grave: In ſuch circumſtances, ſhall it lye for ever buried in impenetrable ſilence? The conſpirators might ſee their friends, on the faith of grounds which they knew did not exiſt, expoſing themſelves to deriſion, reproach, danger, and death. The worſt of men have ſome attachments: at leaſt there are *ſome* people in the world, to whoſe miſery they would not be wantonly inſtrumental. To ſuch people, at the time at leaſt of death, when every motive that bribed their iniquity was no more, may not the conſpirators be ſuppoſed inclined to reveal the important diſcovery, the poſſeſſion of which might ſave their deluded friends

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from a complication of unneceſſary evils? As it would, beſides, have been known that they were the perſons who had acceſs to know the truth, they would have been applied to by the powerful enemies of the cauſe, and aſſailed by all the force of bribery, promiſes, and threatenings.—The ſuppoſition on which I am at preſent reaſoning, includes the idea, that the prime movers of the plan were poſſeſſed of affluence. Take away this ſuppoſition: And how is it ſuppoſeable, that a few men, without power and influence, and without money, could bribe the unconquerable ſecrecy of even twenty, fifty, or a hundred adherents; in oppoſition to the anxious inquiry of friends, and the virulent attacks of powerful foes; in oppoſition to the love of truth, to the deſire of communicating important information, to the relentings of friendſhip, and the remonſtrances of conſcience?—What then

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ſhall we ſay, if, inſtead of twenty, fifty, or a hundred, there muſt have been thouſands, and tens of thouſands, to whom the ſecret muſt have been committed, and whoſe fidelity muſt have been ſecured? What ſhall we ſay, if ſome of the miracles were, from their nature, open to all the world; their truth or falſehood manifeſt as the ſhining of the ſun from the heavens?

The ſame circumſtances which aſſure us of the anxiety of the converts to know the truth, render it alſo certain that they would not make a falſe profeſſion of belief; a profeſſion, againſt which the maſs of worldly motives leaned with incumbent weight.—I will acknowledge, however, that there might perhaps be ſome perſons, who found, in worldly motives, a temptation to profeſs Chriſtianity; thoſe, whoſe poverty and wretchedneſs, Chriſ-

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tian benevolence relieved; thoſe, whoſe parents, friends and patrons, had embraced the faith. I can conceive, that after Chriſtianity had made ſome progreſs, there might ariſe a claſs of perſons, who found, in their particular circumſtances, worldly motives for profeſſing Chriſtianity, which were more than a counterbalance for thoſe by which they were deterred. I ſhould have been willing to have made, on this account, a certain deduction from the number of converts, conſidered as witneſſes to the miracles, if I had not been of opinion, that the true ſtate of the caſe muſt have been publicly notorious; and that it would have been impoſſible for any man to have held up his face, and declared himſelf a believer in their reality, except they had been indeed real.

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PROPOSITION VII.

THAT THOSE PEOPLE, LIVING IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE, WHO DID NOT PROFESS CHRISTIANITY, BUT WHOSE ATTENTION MUST HAVE BEEN ATTRACTED TOWARDS THE MIRACLES PRETENDED TO BE WROUGHT BY ITS PREACHERS, CONSTITUTED AN IMMENSE MULTITUDE.

THE extraordinary nature of thoſe works which the Apoſtles profeſſed and appeared to perform; the boldneſs and the magnitude of their undertaking; the in-

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defatigable activity, and the dauntleſs fortitude, with which they purſued it; the public theatre on which they preached and acted; the extenſive ſucceſs that attended their labours, and crowded multitudes of converts around their ſtandard; all ſerved to reſcue them from neglect, and to attract towards them the eyes of the world. When any man became a Chriſtian, his converſion would awaken, towards the cauſe, the attention of all his relations, friends, and acquaintances; all, whom ſuperſtition, habit, or intereſt, attached moſt firmly to the exiſting modes of religion, would ſhare the feelings of the ſilverſmiths of Epheſus, and would regard the progreſs of Chriſtianity with an eager and watchful eye, as their peculiar concern. The idle, who were ever inquiring for the news, would graſp at it, as an intereſting ſubject, on which to give and to receive information. In companies,

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panies, it would naturally ſuggeſt itſelf as a topic of converſation.—" Art thou on-" ly a ſtranger in Jeruſalem," ſaid two of the diſciples to their unknown Maſter, after his reſurrection, " and haſt not " known the things that have come to " paſs there in theſe days?"—In Jeruſalem, in Antioch, in Epheſus, in Corinth, in Rome, he muſt have been indeed a ſtranger, ſequeſtered from the world, and ignorant of its moſt notorious tranſactions, on whoſe notice Chriſtianity and its miracles had not forced themſelves. The caſe was too extraordinary, to paſs unnoticed; it was alſo too intereſting. Chriſtianity was not beheld with indifferent eyes. It attracted the warmeſt friendſhips: it awakened the keeneſt enmities. The prince and the peaſant were united in their oppoſition. The Emperor iſſued forth ſanguinary edicts. Enraged at the aſpiring claims of thoſe extraordinary men,

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men, who ſought to eſtabliſh their own ſyſtem of religion on the ruins of that of the Empire; the Romans did now, for *the firſt time*, unſheath the ſword of religious perſecution; and a new ſpecies of violence and injuſtice overſpread the wide extent of their provinces with ſuffering and blood. The clamours of the multitude ſeconded the exertions of the civil power, and demanded loudly the deſtruction of the Chriſtians. Violent enmity is inconſiſtent with entire contempt; and the edicts of the Government, the outcries of the multitude, the accuſations againſt the Chriſtians as enemies of mankind, while they teſtify the hatred that was born to the Chriſtian cauſe, aſſure us, that neglect was not its portion.

We perceive with what minute and accurate inquiry the Jews ſcrutinized the cure of the blind man in the goſpel; and

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and this inſtance affords us an example of that kind of inquiry, reſpecting the miracles of Jeſus and his Apoſtles, which, even among thoſe who did not embrace Chriſtianity, curioſity, connexion with the converts, enmity, and other principles, muſt have univerſally awakened.

The Roman Empire, according to Mr Gibbon's computation, contained one hundred and twenty millions of people. Add two thirds, on account of the waſte and renewal that might take place in half a century; and you will have two hundred millions. Subtract two fifths, as perſons under age; you will have a hundred and twenty millions. Subtract, again, ten millions, as the number that had embraced Chriſtianity; and the remainder, according to theſe rude calculations, will give you the number of perſons who, in the half century that I conſider

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der as conſtituting the Apoſtolic age, lived within the bounds of the Roman Empire, without embracing Chriſtianity. The number amounts to one hundred and ten millions; of whom, an immenſe proportion, at leaſt, muſt, in greater or leſs degrees, have had their attention attracted towards the Chriſtian miracles.

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PROPOSITION VIII.

THAT THE PERSONS, MENTIONED IN THE PRECEDING PROPOSITION, HOLD FORTH THEIR UNANIMOUS TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN MIRACLES.

THIS teſtimony is clearly held forth to us, in the ſilence which prevails, throughout antiquity, reſpecting any objections to the truth of the miracles. This total ſilence, with reſpect to objections, which prevails in the goſpels, in all the books of the New Teſtament, in all the writings of the

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the early Chriſtians, and throughout all antiquity, affords a deciſive proof, that no ſuch objections ever were ſtarted. If ſuch objections had been abroad, the friends of Chriſtianity muſt either have had an anſwer to produce, or they muſt have given up their cauſe. This anſwer muſt have been inſerted in the Goſpels and the Acts, along with the accounts of miracles which thoſe books contain. If a hiſtorian chooſe to employ himſelf in recording facts, the reality of which is oppoſed, he is under the neceſſity of employing his pains in clearing away thoſe objections by which the reality of the facts is oppoſed. If the diſputed facts form the foundation of a cauſe in which his heart is moſt deeply intereſted, in ſupport of which it is that he writes his hiſtory; he will feel the neceſſity of this taſk more preſſing, and will, with more eager anxiety, direct his attention to its performance.

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ance. Had objections to the truth of the miracles been abroad, the anſwers to ſuch objections muſt have been of neceſſity inſerted in the Chriſtian hiſtories; they muſt have been alluded to in the Chriſtian epiſtles; they muſt have been inſiſted on in the Chriſtian apologies and defences:—In place of the actual ſilence, the ſound of them muſt have rung through all antiquity, and have obtained a prominent place in every writing that regarded the Chriſtian affairs. No objections, then, were ever ſtarted. The enemies of Chriſtianity were ſilent on that head. But we can have no heſitation in what light the ſilence of enemies ſhall be viewed. It is a plain and unequivocal confeſſion, that there were no objections to ſtart; that nothing was known, to invalidate the certainty of thoſe important facts, which the enemies of Chriſtianity were ſo much concerned to diſprove.

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The ſilence of an enemy, poſſeſſes an unequivocal meaning. But it is not by ſilence only, that the enemies of Chriſtianity teſtify to the truth of the miracles of Jeſus. I now proceed to adduce the open declarations, in which they hold forth their united and favourable teſtimony.

The Phariſees alleged, that Jeſus wrought miracles by Beelzebub, the Prince of Devils; an allegation, which implies an acknowledgement that the miracles were really done, and which proceeds entirely upon that ſuppoſition *.

The moſt ancient writer againſt Chriſtianity, of whom any mention is made, is Celſus, an Epicurean philoſopher, who lived under the Emperors Adrian and the two Antonines. Adrian mounted the throne,

* Matthew, ch. 12.

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throne, in the year of our Lord 117; and the laſt of the Antonines, in the year 161. It appears, therefore, that Celſus lived in the age immediately ſucceeding that of the Apoſtles; and it is poſſible that he may have been born before the death of John. Celſus wrote a book againſt the Chriſtian religion, which has periſhed. But there is extant, an anſwer to that book, by Origen, a learned Chriſtian; of the plan of which anſwer, the writer gives the following deſcription: "But, that we may not ſeem deſignedly "to paſs over any of his arguments, as "having no anſwer to make, we have "determined to confute every one of his "objections, according to our ability; "obſerving, not the natural connexion of "things, but the order in which he has "wrote them in his book *." This accuracy

* Orig. con. Celſ.

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curacy ſerves very effectually to ſupply the loſs of the original work of Celſus: and it aſſures us, that Celſus joined in the univerſal ſilence as to objections againſt the reality of the miracles; no ſuch objections (except ſome remarks on the reſurrection of Jeſus) being noticed or anſwered by Origen. The following paſſages from Origen, contain Celſus's acknowledgement of the reality of the miracles—"But he" (Celſus) "feigned "ſomething elſe: He acknowledges, in- "deed, ſomehow, the wonderful miracles "which Jeſus performed, by which he "perſuaded many to follow him as Chriſt; "but was deſirous of calumniating them, "as performed by magic, and not by "Divine power." For he ſays, "that "he" (Chriſt) "being brought up in "obſcurity, was obliged to ſerve for hire "in Egypt; and having learned, there, "certain powerful arts, returned thence, "declaring

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" declaring himſelf a god on account of " theſe miracles *. "—Porphyry, the Tyrian, accounted the moſt able and learned of the Heathen writers againſt Chriſtianity, flouriſhed in the middle of the third century; and wrote fifteen books againſt the Chriſtian religion. Thoſe books, with the anſwers written to them, have periſhed; and, reſpecting the contents of them, there can be gleaned, from ancient authors, only a very few particulars. The following paſſage from Jerome, tranſmits to us Porphyry's acknowledgement of the reality of the miracles—" Unleſs, " ſays he, " according to the manner of the " Gentiles and profane, of Porphyry and " Eunomius, you pretend that theſe are " the tricks of demons †." This paſſage implies, that Porphyry had admitted the facts, but that he aſcribed them to

* Orig. contra Celſum.

† Jer. con. Vigil. See Paley, part 3. ch. 5.

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the operation of demons, who were accounted intermediate beings between the gods and men, from whom, according to Plato, proceeded all prophecy and magic. The philoſopher Hierocles lived about the commencement of the fourth century; and his book againſt the Chriſtian religion, in which he oppoſes the miracles of Apollonius Tyanæus to thoſe of Jeſus, is anſwered by Euſebius the hiſtorian. The following paſſage is found in Euſebius—"They boaſt of it in all places," ſays Hierocles, "and honour Jeſus as giv-
"ing ſight to the blind.—Nevertheleſs,
"in the days of our anceſtors, during
"the reign of Nero, flouriſhed Apollo-
"nius Tyanæus: He alſo did many
"wonderful things. Now, we reckon
"him who did ſuch wonderful things,
"not a god, but only a man in favour
"with the gods; whereas they give the
"appellation

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" appellation of God, to Jeſus, becauſe " he performed a few miracles *. "

The Emperor Julian, ſurnamed the Apoſtate, ſucceeded Conſtantius in the Imperial throne, in the year of our Lord 361. He wrote againſt the Chriſtian religion. " Jeſus, " ſays he, " about " three hundred years ago, having gained a few followers, and thoſe of the " meaneſt ſort, is now famous, having " performed nothing, through the whole " courſe of his life, worthy of fame; unleſs one reckons the curing of the lame " and the blind, and the exorciſing of " devils in the villages of Bethſaida and " Bethany, to be the greateſt of works †. " Voluſian is another Heathen, who, though an enemy of Chriſtianity, makes the ſame acknowledgement of the reality of the

* Apud Euſeb. p. 512.
† Apud Cyrill. lib. vi. p. 191.

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the miracles*. The paſſage formerly quoted from Jerome, mentions Eunomius as another, from whom the ſame acknowledgement had proceeded; and it aſcribes that ſame acknowledgement to the Gentiles and prophane in general. The Jewiſh Talmudical books, however inimical to Chriſtianity, acknowledge the reality of the miracles—"He healed the lame and "the leprous; and raiſed a dead man; "and in Galilee walked on the ſea †."—"In Talmude nominatim citati ſunt, "qui a diſcipulo Chriſti Jacobo, a deſ-"peratiſſimis morbis invocato nomine "Chriſti, momento ſanati ſunt; vel ſa-"nari ſe poſſe non dubitaverint ‡." The Sepher Toledoth Jeſhu, a book forged by the Jews againſt Chriſtianity, contains the

* Voluſian, Epiſt. ad Auguſt. 34.

† Talm. Hier. Tr. Sch. in Pug. fid. ii. 1, 3, 6.

‡ Coch. in Sanh. xi. 36. n. 9. See for both paſſages, Coventry's Defence, ſecond edit. p. 325.

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the following paſſage—" And Jeſus ſaid, " Bring hither to me a leper, and I will " heal him: And they brought him a le- " per; and he put his hand upon him, and " pronounced the great name, and the " man was cured; and he became again " like the fleſh of a child. Moreover, " Jeſus ſaid, Bring hither to me a dead " body; and they brought him one that " was dead. He laid his hand upon " him, and pronounced the name; and " he came to life, and ſtood upon his " feet *." The Talmudical books aſcribed the miracles of Jeſus to magic; or to an occult virtue in the name JEHOVAH, called by them, *Shem-maphoreſch*, or the diſtinguiſhed name; the true writing and literary pronunciation of which, they ſay, he ſtole out of the Temple. The Heathen and Jewiſh writers, quoted above, are

* For this quotation, as alſo for others in this Propoſition, ſee M'Knight's Truth of the Goſp. Hiſt. b. II. c. 4.

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are to be conſidered as the ſpokeſmen for the Jewiſh and Heathen world. Their united teſtimony aſſures us, that neither they themſelves, their contemporaries, nor their predeceſſors, had ever known any valid objections to the truth of the Chriſtian miracles; nor had ever been able to refuſe that acknowledgement of their truth, which the notoriety of thoſe extraordinary and important facts irreſiſtibly claimed.

PRO-

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PROPOSITION IX.

THAT THE PERSONS, MENTIONED IN THE TWO PRECEDING PROPOSITIONS, IN THE TESTIMONY WHICH THEY BEAR TO THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN MIRACLES, ARE WITNESSES, OF THE MOST UNEXCEPTIONABLE KIND.

CHRISTIANITY could not be regarded with total indifference. You muſt have been either its friend, or its foe. Intereſt, politics, habit, prejudice, ſuperſtition, inflamed againſt it, in every quarter, multiplied

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tiplied and virulent hatred: And if any man was leſs influenced by theſe principles, yet the refuſal to embrace Chriſtianity, proceeding from whatever cauſe, did, of courſe, in as far as the religion engaged his attention at all, render him intereſted in diſproving and diſbelieving it. All, therefore, who were led to direct their attention to Chriſtianity, without embracing it, were, of courſe, with greater or leſs violence, enemies to its truth, and to every thing by which its truth was confirmed.

It is very plain, that ſuch perſons, in bearing teſtimony to the truth of the miracles, did not mean to deceive; that their teſtimony was indubitably ſincere, extorted from reluctant, but unavoidable perſuaſion:—I ſay, from reluctant perſuaſion. It is true, that they ſometimes affect to ſpeak of thoſe miracles with contempt.

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tempt. They repreſent them as things of trifling moment; they compare them to the feats of magicians, and to the tricks of Egyptian jugglers. They adduce pretended hiſtories of other men, who performed things more wonderful. They eſcape from admitting the juſt conſequence of the miracles, by referring them to magic, to the operation of devils and demons; by denying that ſuch works were the marks of connexion with Heaven.—But, are not theſe the vain ebullitions of impotent reſentment—the ſubterfuges of enemies, who ſtrive to underrate the value, and miſinterpret the import of that ſupernatural evidence, which they cannot deny to exiſt?—Celſus wrote againſt magic; and yet is compelled to have recourſe to it, as the only ſolution for the Chriſtian miracles. Did he regard with indifference, thoſe ſtubborn facts, the notoriety of which defied denial, confounded his

ſcepticiſm, and compelled him to own thoſe magical powers, which, on other occaſions, he endeavoured to expoſe? He, who detected the artifices of magicians, and opened the eyes of the ignorant to the arts that impoſed on their credulity—would not he have detected, with eager delight, the artifices (had ſuch exiſted) of Him whom Julian accounted the greateſt of magicians *? If he affected to ſpeak of the Chriſtian miracles lightly, was not his apparent indifference aſſumed, to conceal his ſecret ſpleen?—When Hierocles ſpeaks ſlightingly of the performing of a few miracles; when Julian ſays that Jeſus did nothing worthy of fame, unleſs you reckon curing of the lame and blind to be the greateſt of works: Is not the ſame interpretation to be put upon their words—are they not ſpeaking the language of the fox in the fable, who called the grapes, that he could not reach, ſour; and covering

* The Apoſtle Paul, apud Cyrill. lib. 3. p. 100.

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ing their real chagrin with the maſk of aſſumed indifference? Even if it had been poſſible to ſuppoſe, that the enemies of Chriſtianity did not conſider the miracles important for the confirmation of its truth; they could not, however, fail to perceive, that the detection of impoſture in the miracles, would be deciſive for the aſcertainment of its falſehood: They could not fail to perceive, that this would be the completeſt triumph which their enmity could deſire; that this would blaſt, for ever, the name of Chriſtianity; overwhelm its adherents with confuſion; and annihilate the ſchemes of thoſe ſucceſsful innovators, who were turning the world upſide down.

Were theſe, objects which the enemies of Chriſtianity regarded with indifference? Was the deſtruction of Chriſtianity an object of indifference to the Chief Prieſts,

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the Scribes, the Phariſees—that object, the accompliſhment of which they purſued through ſo much violence and blood? Was that an object of indifference to the Roman Government, for which they waged, throughout the extent of their provinces, ten unjuſt and inhuman perſecutions; added a new branch to their criminal law; and put to death, with cruel tortures, ſubjects, who had never offended the public peace, nor infringed the rights of any individual; ſubjects, who bound themſelves, by oath, not to break faith, not to commit theft, robbery or adultery *; whoſe only crime was that religion, to which their pure morality owed its birth? Was the deſtruction of Chriſtianity an object of indifference to Pliny? Was it an object of indifference to the prieſts, who derived, from the eſtabliſhed ſuperſtitions, their ſubſiſtence, influence, and

* See Pliny's letter, quoted above.

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and dignity? Was it an object of indifference to the workmen whom Demetrius assembled at Ephesus; or to others who, like them, professed trades connected with the temples and existing rites? The opposition, so earnestly and severely pursued by the leading men of Judea; the bloody edicts, emitted from the Imperial court; the clamours of the multitude, mentioned in the rescript of Adrian; the riot at Ephesus, and the principle on which it proceeded; the tenor of Pliny's letter to Trajan—Are not all decisive evidences, that the destruction of the Christian cause was not an object of indifference; and that, had there been any possibility of supposing collusion and imposture in its miracles, the detection would have been eagerly attempted, and, if accomplished, triumphantly made known?

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The ſixth propoſition has anticipated the matter which alſo belongs to this. I have there called the reader to reflect on the multiplied and matchleſs abſurdity of ſuppoſing, that the Chriſtian miracles were artificial and falſe; on the total impoſſibility of ſuppoſing, that ſuch artifice could have concealed itſelf from the penetration of virulent, powerful enemies, eager to obtain a diſcovery that would be fatal to the hated cauſe, and which, on the ſuppoſition of forgery, they had every means of infallibly obtaining. From what was ſaid there, and in this propoſition together, it may appear abundantly evident, that the perſons mentioned in the two preceding propoſitions, in the teſtimony which they bear to the Chriſtian miracles, are witneſſes, of the moſt unexceptionable kind.

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PROPOSITION X.

THAT THE TESTIMONY FOR THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN MIRACLES, WHICH HAS BEEN STATED IN THE PRECEDING PROPOSITIONS, IS NOT OPPOSED BY ANY CONTRARY TESTIMONY.

THE acknowledgement, or the silence, of the enemies of Christianity, was universal. There is not a single witness who can be brought in, as giving testimony against the miracles. There is not to be found, in antiquity, even a rumour of any thing resembling the detection of imposture.

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impoſture. The caſe is an unembarraſſed one. You are not perplexed with the neceſſity of weighing oppoſite evidences againſt each other. The witneſſes are all on one ſide; and while one ſcale is borne down with all accumulated weight, the other is empty.

It may afford ſome matter of ſurpriſe, to thoſe who reflect on this ſubject, that there is no production of oppoſite evidence. Was the virtue of the leading men in Judea, and in the Gentile world, too pure, to admit of the practice of deceit? If they were influenced in their oppoſition to Chriſtianity by private intereſt, by the hatred of goodneſs, by attachment to vice; men, acting from unlawful principles, would not ſhrink from the employment of unlawful means. If a regard to the eſtabliſhed religion, a regard to the imagined ſecurity and welfare of the State, mingled

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mingled themſelves with private and wicked principles; it is well known, that, purſuing ſuch ends as theſe, prieſts and ſtateſmen have, too often, not applied a very rigorous morality to the means which they employed. May it not, therefore, be deemed a juſt matter of ſurpriſe, that there never was any outcry of impoſture raiſed? Was not this to be expected, whether the miracles were true or not? Was not this the leaſt that could be expected, from the hatred of the ſtateſmen and the prieſts, poſſeſſed of money, influence, and power? Applying thoſe powerful engines of iniquity, might they not eaſily have ſuborned falſe evidence? What is the ſolution of this difficulty—from whence did it proceed, that wealth, power, and influence, ranged in oppoſition to Chriſtianity, did never produce the appearance of detected impoſture? Do not theſe conſiderations ſeem to warrant

rant this concluſion—That the working of miracles by Jeſus and his Apoſtles, was a matter of public *notoriety;* manifeſt to all the world, as the ſun ſhining from the heavens; and completely undeniable? It was not the truth of the miracles—it was not the enemy's conviction of their truth; it was their public notoriety alone, that could have ſaved them from pretended detections. It was only the abſolute impoſſibility of any man holding up his face to deny them, that could have ſaved them from being denied.

It may perhaps be thought, that there lies an exception to the truth of my preſent propoſition, in the caſe of the reſurrection of Jeſus. That great fact was treated by the Phariſees as a deception; and there was, with regard to it, a ſubornation of falſe evidence.

Now,

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Now, I would here obſerve, in the *firſt* place, that this denial and ſubornation of evidence, apply only to this particular caſe; and were not conſidered, by the enemies of Chriſtianity themſelves, as inferring any conſequences inimical to the truth of the reſt of the miracles. My object in theſe papers has been, to eſtabliſh the general point, That miracles were performed in atteſtation of the truth of Chriſtianity; and in oppoſition to this general point, there is not to be found any contrary teſtimony. Particular miracles might perhaps be denied; thoſe which were performed in a more retired ſcene, the certainty of which did not ſhine forth notorious, and the denial of which was therefore poſſible. Theſe partial denials were inconſiſtent and vain, while the general point was admitted; but might proceed from falſe conceptions, and virulent enmity. But theſe partial denials do not affect

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affect the general point, That miracles were wrought; a point, which is univerſally admitted, and which, eſtabliſhed by the utmoſt accumulation of human teſtimony, is entirely unembarraſſed by any oppoſition of teſtimonies, or of opinions.

I obſerve, in the *next* place, with regard to the reſurrection, that the ſtory which the ſoldiers were bribed to tell, does not appear in the ſhape of oppoſite teſtimony; becauſe the ſoldiers could not bear teſtimony to any thing that happened while they were aſleep. The ſtory, at the utmoſt, could only ſerve to ſhew, that the Apoſtles had had an opportunity of ſtealing the body—but, to the actual commiſſion of the theft, the ſoldiers could not poſſibly bear witneſs; becauſe, if it took place at all, it was while they were ſleeping.—The object of this propoſition, is only to ſtate, that there is no oppoſite teſtimony;

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teſtimony; and the above mentioned ſtory, having been ſhewn not to be of that deſcription, might have been diſmiſſed.

I ſhall, however, ſtep perhaps a little out of my way, to remark upon this ſtory, in the *third* place, that it carries within it, in its manifeſt improbability, its own confutation.—Was it probable, that a body of men, who, from the expreſſion "ſome "of the watch," muſt have conſiſted of ſeveral individuals, who were placed upon duty—upon duty of ſo peculiar a kind as was likely to awaken peculiar attention—ſhould be ſo negligent of their duty, ſo unaffected by the peculiarity of the caſe, ſo regardleſs of the puniſhment which they might dread for their negligence, as all at one time to fall aſleep? Allow that this did happen; how did the Apoſtles foreſee it, or think it likely, ſo as to have their plan concerted upon ſuppoſition

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of its happening? How did they know the time when it happened? How did they venture into the midſt of the keepers, who were ſtationed, we are to ſuppoſe, round, or near the entrance of the ſepulchre? How did they venture to tranſact, in the midſt of them, ſo operoſe a work as the removal of the body; the noiſe and exertions attending which, were in danger of awakening, againſt them, the notice and the fury of the ſoldiers? Without ſome colluſion between them and the great men, would the ſoldiers have made known, although true, a neglect of duty, which, when made known, ſubjected them to diſgrace and puniſhment? Does not their publication of their own crime, betray the appearance of colluſion?—This ſtory is the only caſe, in antiquity, in which the enemies of Chriſtianity are known to have attempted the ſubornation of falſe evidence againſt

gainſt the miracles: It is, at leaſt, the only caſe that has come to my knowledge.

In the latter part of the fifteenth chapter of the firſt volume of his hiſtory, Mr Gibbon brings forward ſome remarks, which ſeem to aim at the production of oppoſite teſtimony.—He ſays, that the ſages of Greece and Rome turned aſide from the awful ſpectacle of the Chriſtian miracles; and, purſuing the ordinary occupations of life and ſtudy, appeared unconſcious of any alterations in the moral or phyſical government of the world. He particularizes the names of Seneca, of the elder and younger Pliny, of Tacitus, of Plutarch, of Galen, of the ſlave Epictetus, and of the Emperor Marcus Antoninus.—I requeſt the reader's attention to the following obſervations on thoſe ſections of Mr Gibbon.

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It has been proven above, that the firſt preachers of Chriſtianity did pretend to work miracles. To theſe pretenſions, the ſages of Greece and Rome, and all who refuſed to embrace Chriſtianity, did either lend their attention, or they did not. It has been proven above, that all who did lend attention, bear witneſs to the truth of theſe pretenſions; and it is very plain, that thoſe who did not lend attention, are witneſſes for neither their falſehood nor their truth; nor could give any teſtimony whatever, reſpecting a matter that had not at all ſhared their obſervation.—But the point of Mr Gibbon's argument, lies, I apprehend, in the following ſyllogiſm.—Such ſupernatural works, had they really happened, muſt have arreſted the attention of all the world, and, among the reſt, of all the ſages of Greece and Rome; but we find that thoſe ſages were unacquainted with any ſuch ſuper-

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ſupernatural works; therefore, no ſuch ſupernatural works were performed.—Now, of this ſyllogiſm, I challenge, in the firſt place, the minor propoſition; and I aſk, How do we *find* that the ſages of Greece and Rome were unacquainted with any ſuch ſupernatural works? Is their ignorance preſumed from the ſilence of their writings reſpecting ſuch facts? It is to be replied, that negative arguments, deduced from ſilence, muſt, from their nature, be often ambiguous; that reaſons, unknown, occaſion omiſſions which appear ſurpriſing; that the ſubjects, of which thoſe writers treated, might not lead them to ſpeak of the Chriſtian affairs; that miracles form a different claſs of facts, from thoſe phenomena of nature which employed the pens of Seneca and Pliny.—And there is another deeper, and more deciſive objection, againſt conſidering the ſilence of the Grecian and Roman ſages as a good proof of

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their ignorance. The miracles of Chriſtianity were not mere matters of curious obſervation; they were the foundations of that dire ſuperſtition *, for which Tacitus ſeems to think no name of opprobrium too ſevere: And if they were real ſupernatural works, there was a deep reaſon, why Tacitus, and all who ſhared his ſentiments, ſhould obſerve upon the ſubject a profound and ſullen ſilence. If the miracles of Chriſtianity were impoſtures, why did not Tacitus probe them with his hoſtile and penetrating eye? His language ſeems to ſhew, that his mind was embittered on the ſubject of Chriſtianity. Condemnation ſo ſevere, and, even in Mr Gibbon's opinion, ſo unjuſt, ſeems to betray the irritation of one who takes in the ſubject the intereſt of an enemy. And it ſurely would have been both humane and patriotic, to have extinguiſhed the miſchievous ſect, by undeceiving its deluded

* Tacit. Annal. 15. 44. quoted by Gibbon, Hiſt. 16th ch.

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luded partizans, to have thus prevented the neceſſity of thoſe cruel, but abortive meaſures, to which the Government reſorted in vain. Was it, becauſe he knew that they were falſe, or becauſe he knew too well that they were true, that this inflamed adverſary is ſilent on the ſubject of the miracles? Was it not to be expected, on the ſuppoſition of the truth of the miracles, that thoſe who obſerved them, without embracing Chriſtianity, would be diſpoſed to obſerve, with regard to them, a ſpiteful and ſullen ſilence—unable to deny, yet unwilling to acknowledge, feeling ſore upon the ſubject?

Is it alleged, that ſupernatural works, had they been really performed, would infallibly have produced the converſion of all mankind, in particular of the wiſe and learned; whoſe rejection of Chriſtianity is of courſe an evidence of their ignorance of

of any ſupernatural works atteſting it?—I oppoſe to this allegation, the following conſiderations.

The Jews and the Heathens did both refuſe to conſider miracles as the unequivocal proofs of a divine miſſion; and they imagined thoſe ſupernatural facts to be referable to the agency of devils and of demons. Their knowledge, therefore, of the reality of the miracles, did by no means, in their apprehenſion, imply, as an unavoidable conſequence, the belief of Chriſtianity.—Is it not alſo eaſily ſuppoſeable, that they might view the matter with too careleſs eyes? Engroſſed with the objects of this world, careleſs of futurity, blinded by their prejudices, and governed by their paſſions; the miracles had not power to fix their attention, to tear them from the world, and touch their minds with that religious ſenſe which

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which had before been unexperienced. The ſupernatural evidence was moſt ſtriking; but it was of a calm and tranquil, not of an overwhelming and compulſive nature. The dwellings of the deſpiſers of Chriſtianity did not bury their inhabitants in their ruins; the earth did not ſink beneath their ſteps; the thunder of heaven did not ſtrike them. They purſued their accuſtomed occupations with their uſual tranquillity and ſafety: the ordinary courſe of nature was unaltered. The power, the ſplendour, the proſperity of this world continued to diſtinguiſh the enemies of Chriſtianity; and they abandoned its humble, perſecuted friends. The ſupernatural evidence preſented itſelf to the ſenſes of mankind: It ſought to influence their reaſon; but it was capable of being forgotten. Its calm voice might be drowned amidſt the noiſe and hurry of the world. Prejudice, habit, pride, intereſt

intereſt and pleaſure, might refuſe to yield to it.—You ſay, that it appears to you incredible, that, amidſt the diſplay of ſupernatural evidences, there ſhould remain one man unconverted. And in like manner, previous to experience, it might perhaps have appeared incredible, that, amidſt thoſe ideas of religion which are prevalent in Chriſtian countries, there ſhould be any man careleſs of religion. Previous to experience, it might perhaps have appeared incredible, that any man ſhould purſue ſenſual indulgences, to ſuch an extent, as to ſacrifice, in the fatal purſuit, his health, fortune, reputation, and life. Previous to hiſtorical information, it might perhaps have appeared incredible, that any man, placed in the ſublime ſtation of a Roman Emepror—called upon, ſo loudly, by honour, conſcience, humanity, to improve their extenſive opportunities of promoting human happineſs, ſhould have exhibited

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exhibited the character and conduct which have placed at the head of the list of infamy, a Commodus, a Caligula, and an Heliogabalus. Do men never act against their reason? Do they never neglect the care of future interests, that are known to be more important, amidst their engrossment with concerns less momentous, but more immediate? Do ancient and confirmed impressions and habits, uniformly yield to the unaccustomed influence of new ideas that are more reasonable? Do the greatest talents, and the deepest penetration, form a certain security against the dominion of pride and avarice, of prejudice and habit, of pleasure and ambition?—Might not the great men of Rome be firmly determined, that they would at all events support the ancient superstition, with which their own dignity, and, as they imagined, the welfare and greatness of the

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the State, were connected? Might they not be well resolved, that the pride of Rome should not be humbled, in a point so delicate, and so momentous; that the mistress of the world should not resign that ancient religion, under the auspices of which she had risen to grandeur unrivalled; nor take, in its stead, a new faith, brought to her, by Jews, from a province which her arms had subdued, and whose narrow territory her eye could scarcely discern on the map of her immense dominions? Might they not be well resolved, that they would not join those deserters of the public religion, against whom they had exclaimed as the most abandoned of men; that they would not throw aside their pontifical robes, retire from the altar, renounce the honour of leading the public ceremonies, and confess that the system which they had solemnly supported was delusion; in order

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der that, having renounced every thing which they had formerly maintained to be sacred, they might submit, as children, to be taught from the mouths of fishermen of Galilee?—In the Sixth Proposition, I have mentioned several circumstances which might oppose the progress of Christianity, and which, consequently, serve to account for its rejection. These circumstances will be found insisted on by a variety of writers: I refer the reader particularly to the chapter in Paley's Evidences, entitled, "Rejection of Christianity."

With respect to the first proposition of our syllogism, it does indeed seem probable, that some sound of the Christian miracles must have reached all who were not entirely secluded from intercourse with the world, and from information of its occurrences. But it is perhaps

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poſſible to ſuppoſe, that that ſound might, notwithſtanding the truth of the ſupernatural works, reach ſome ſo faintly, as to allow them ſtill to keep themſelves in ſcepticiſm. It is perhaps poſſible to ſuppoſe, that ſome of the philoſophers and ſtateſmen might keep themſelves ſo remote from the ſcene of the Chriſtian miracles, that they might reject or prohibit, with ſuch ridicule and diſdain, all information on the ſubject, as to ſhut out from their view the certainty of facts which were notorious to the bulk of mankind. Do not princes and great men often remain ignorant of the moſt notorious truths, which thoſe, who have acceſs to their perſons, are afraid or unwilling to communicate? May not the moſt notorious truths, the ſound of which has happened to reach them, be repreſented, by thoſe on whom they depend for information, as uncertain or falſe? When you ſay,

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ſay, that a fact is notorious, you mean that it is publicly, generally known; while there may ſtill be people ſo remote from information, ſo peculiarly ſituated, as to remain in uncertainty or ignorance; and in this number thoſe of the higheſt rank are very likely to be included.

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REFLECTIONS

ON

THE PRECEDING EVIDENCE.

THE concluſion which I think myſelf entitled to draw from the evidence that has now been laid before the reader, is this—The working of miracles by the firſt preachers of Chriſtianity, is a fact, not merely attended with a certain degree of probability, but it is a fact abſolutely certain. It is a fact, removed beyond the poſſibility of doubt, beyond the verge of lawful

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lawful controverſy. It is a fact, which I am entitled to hold as certain as the exiſtence of the paper on which I write, or of the chair on which I am ſeated. Theſe are ſtrong aſſertions; but they are warranted by the evidence which I have been employed in exhibiting. That there was a great battle fought at Pharſalia, between Pompey and Julius Cæſar; that there lived, in that age, ſuch a man as the famed ſubverter of the liberties of Rome: —theſe are facts, of which no man, acquainted with ancient hiſtory, entertains a doubt; any more than he does of the exiſtence of the chair on which he ſits, or of the truth of Euclid's propoſitions. The evidence of teſtimony may ariſe to ſuch a height, as to be perfectly equivalent to that of ſenſe, or of demonſtration: and there are many points in ancient hiſtory, (of which the Chriſtian miracles

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conſtitute one), in which the evidence of teſtimony does ariſe to this height.

After the matter which I have exhibited; the anxiety which muſt have exiſted in the innumerable friends, and in the innumerable foes of Chriſtianity, to know the real ſtate of the caſe—the perfect opportunity of diſcovering it, which they poſſeſſed—the univerſal acknowledgement which, amidſt the utmoſt caution to guard againſt deception on the one ſide, and the moſt virulent diſlike to own the truth on the other, all do with one conſent agree in making—the boundleſs magnitude of the evidence, and the total want of any thing to be put into the oppoſite ſcale—Am I not warranted to conclude, that the reality of the miracles appeared to the people of that age, as notorious and undeniable as the ſhining of the ſun; and that it is a point, to me, as certain as the battle

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battle of Pharſalia, or the exiſtence of ſuch a man as Julius Cæſar; as certain, as the exiſtence of the object which my eyes behold?

I wiſh the reader to underſtand the claim which I conſider the evidence ſtated, as having on his faith. It does not merely require him to acknowledge the probability of the facts which it ſupports;—it requires him to acknowledge their undoubted certainty;—it requires him to admit them within the circle from which all doubt is excluded; and to embrace them, with a conviction, no leſs aſſured, than that which he attaches to the objects of his touch, or of his ſight.

In oppoſition to this high claim, it may be deemed a ſtrong objection, that the truth of the miracles has been often conteſted and denied; conteſted and denied,

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nied, not merely by the thoughtleſs and diſſipated, but even by ſome of thoſe whoſe names ſtand high in the liſt of philoſophic fame.

Now, before proceeding to make ſome obſervations on the infidelity of philoſophers, I muſt requeſt the reader to attend to the ſtate of the fact; and I muſt warn him againſt imagining that infidelity is the *general* ſentiment which has prevailed among ſpeculative men. There are numbered, it is true, in the ranks of Infidelity, a HUME, a ROUSSEAU, and a VOLTAIRE. But there are other names, before the philoſophical ſplendour of which, thoſe that I have mentioned, diſappear. Chriſtianity was the religion of LOCKE, of BACON, and of NEWTON. Of other philoſophical men, the bulk, I imagine, have profeſſed, and, ſo far as is known, have believed, the Chriſtian religion.

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religion. Infidelity is a peculiar opinion, entertained indeed by many men of abilities and ſpeculation; and, of late, become particularly faſhionable among the French philoſophers and their adherents—but ſtill, a peculiar opinion, adopted only by a party of philoſophers. On this partial infidelity of philoſophers, I make the following obſervations.

There are different circumſtances, by which the judgement of philoſophers, on this ſubject, may be ſuppoſed to have been perverted. Their ſpeculations may have encountered the doctrines which the ſcripture reveals; their paſſions and evil habits may have hated its virtuous maxims; their contempt for the ſuperſtition with which religion has been ſometimes overwhelmed, may have unjuſtly and careleſsly extended itſelf to true religion; they may have ſtood at a diſtance from

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from the ſubject, and, not looking into it narrowly, have overlooked the decided diſtinction which ſeparates the true miracles from thoſe falſe pretenſions that have abounded in the world. The caſe is clear and indubitable, when you ſearch into it; but it requires ſome reſearch. It is a point of ancient hiſtory; and it is eaſy to ſtand aloof, and to prejudge it. A man who, at his entrance upon life, has imbibed a philoſophic contempt for all ſuperſtition, may purſue the reſearches of law, of chemiſtry, of natural philoſophy, of natural hiſtory; he may reach the very ſummit of fame in theſe different departments, and, at the ſame time, continue blind to the truth of an ancient fact, to the evidence of which he diſdains to attend. It will be found, I imagine, that the rejection of Chriſtianity has generally, if not always, been attended, in ſome degree, with non-examination, and prejudging

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judging contempt. I do not know that any of its enemies have made it the ſubject of their peculiar and profound inveſtigation. If, from theſe, or other cauſes, one or two eminent philoſophers ſhall have eſpouſed and maintained the Anti-chriſtian cauſe, their infidelity does then give the tone to the faſhion, and is imitated in the ſervile circle of their admirers and followers.

If the learned and philoſophic enemies of the Chriſtian faith, have not ſtudied its evidences with peculiar and profound reſearch; this want of examination will detract from the authority of their opinions, in two reſpects. In the firſt place, Becauſe it does, of courſe, render them leſs qualified to form a ſound judgement in the caſe: In the ſecond place, Becauſe it gives ground to ſuſpect their ſerioufneſs, conſcientiouſneſs, and reverential impreſ-

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ſions of the importance of the ſubject. Is it a light matter, to tear up the foundations, on which the virtue, the conſolation, and the hope of mankind, reſt? Shall Chriſtianity, ſupported by ſuch evidences; believed and defended by ſuch numbers of enlightened men; the religion of LOCKE, of BACON, of NEWTON—Shall Chriſtianity be deemed ſo notoriouſly and obviouſly falſe, as not to deſerve examination? Shall the ſentiments of mankind, on this point, of ſuperlative importance, be attacked by any, who have not acquired the moſt profound and extenſive acquaintance with the ſubject? I will not ſay, (though ſuch an idea might perhaps be defended by no feeble arguments)—I will not ſay, that if Chriſtianity were falſe, the truth ſhould not be made appear: But I will ſay, That, by all the veneration due to things divine; by all the ineſtimable value of heavenly inſtructions;

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by all the regard that is due to the virtue, conſolation, and happineſs of man; by all the reſpect and tenderneſs due to opinions ancient and eſtabliſhed; by all the high reſponſibility which the patrons of ſuch innovations incur—every man is in the ſtrongeſt manner warned to beware of attacking Chriſtianity, without at leaſt the moſt ſcrupulous caution, and the moſt mature, profound reſearch. If any man act otherwiſe, is he a wiſe and good man? is he a man, whoſe prudence, modeſty, integrity, and ſerioufneſs, are ſuch as may entitle his opinion to confidence and reſpect?

It is to be obſerved, that the evidence ſtated in the preceding propoſitions, is not a ſubject, for determining on which, we need have recourſe to the opinion of men of extraordinary parts. It is a ſubject, on which every man, of ſound, com-

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mon ſenſe, is qualified to form a judgement: He is perhaps better qualified to form a ſound judgement, than a man of extraordinary parts, and ſhining genius.

There is perhaps no claſs of men, among whom you may more readily expect error from the plain and ſound principles of common ſenſe, than among men of genius and ſpeculation. Thoſe who leave the beaten track, and employ themſelves in ſearching out new paths of truth, are the perſons moſt likely to wander into new paths of error. If there be a paſſion that wiſhes to lead them aſtray, and that has their inclination on its ſide, their genius and imagination, fertile in ſophiſtry, ſupply them too readily with the means of ſelf-deception, and ſerve to promote the perverſion of their judgement.

Conſider

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Conſider the abſurd, the monſtrous opinions, into which ſophiſtry has, on other points, miſled philoſophers; and you will perceive, that a holy religion, encountering, in various ways, the opinions, prejudices, and paſſions of mankind, might very well be denied, without ſuch denial reflecting ſuſpicion on the certainty of its evidence. If men have aſſerted, that the progreſs of improvement may hereafter ſuperſede the neceſſity of ſleep, and may entirely baniſh death from the abodes of men *; that the frame of nature does not diſcover the evidence of an intelligent framer—If they have denied the exiſtence of a material world around them; if they have denied the exiſtence of men themſelves—Is there any thing ſo certain, which theſe men might not deny; any thing ſo abſurd, which they might not maintain? A ſpeculative and inventive genius is of much

* Some ſuch ideas, I think, are thrown out by a modern ſpeculator, whoſe writings I have not read.

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uſe, in exploring new tracks, in inventing new arguments, in widening the limits of human knowledge: But its excellence does not conſiſt in leading its poſſeſſor to found judgements of things; and it is very likely to happen, that, with its more uſeful productions, there ſhall be mingled a proportion of error. A fertile ſoil produces, more abundantly than a barren one, both good grain and weeds.

A man who applies his ſpeculations to practice in agriculture, may very probably make uſeful improvements; and he may, by his ſpeculations, benefit the public: But it is a common remark, that ſuch men, while they benefit perhaps the public, do yet, from the frequent failure of their projects, hurt their own fortunes. If the public, inſtead of ſelecting what is uſeful in ſuch projects, were to adopt them in the groſs, it would receive damage.

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In like manner, were the public to take, in the groſs, the opinions maintained by men of genius, it would be miſled into notions the moſt extravagant and abſurd. It is the buſineſs of ſound, common ſenſe, to ſeparate the chaff from the good grain. It is to the judgement of ſound, common ſenſe, that the opinions which ſpring from a luxuriant and inventive genius, are to be referred; and it is by it, that their ſolidity is to be tried. If I am to take any human opinion as an authority, it is the aggregate judgement of the greateſt poſſible number of men of ſound, common ſenſe, rightly informed on the ſubject. The office of men of genius is, not to judge, but to invent; and, to follow them as authorities, is to miſtake entirely the province, in the intellectual world, which they are qualified for occupying.

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There is another claſs of unbelievers, beſides the ſpeculative men, who poſſeſs, or pretend to poſſeſs, genius. This claſs conſiſts of thoſe who do not think at all; who learn their objections to religion at a convivial meeting; and who give you, in the place of argument, the name of ſome famous philoſopher who was an infidel. Theſe are harmleſs opponents; and, on the whole, we need not be in any degree diſturbed, if the facts which I have been conſidering, be conteſted by thoſe who do not think at all; by thoſe who have never attended to this particular caſe; or by thoſe wild ſpeculators, for whoſe imagination there is nothing too abſurd, and for whoſe doubts there is nothing too certain.

The enemies of Chriſtianity muſter other inſtances of pretended miracles; they expatiate on the evidence by which thoſe

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thoſe pretenſions were confirmed; and wiſh to repreſent this evidence as equivalent, or ſuperior, to that which eſtabliſhes the miracles of Chriſtianity. I muſt entreat the reader to conſult, on this ſubject, Paley's Evidences, Campbell's Inquiry, and Douglas's Criterion; in which authors, he will find a conſideration of the evidence alleged in ſupport of other miracles.

I have no doubt that there are no miracles, Popiſh, Mahometan, or Heathen, which will bear any compariſon with thoſe of Chriſtianity. But if you had been able to produce other miracles, equally authenticated as thoſe of Chriſtianity, I ſhould then have only replied, that then thoſe miracles alſo had been indeed performed. It would not have mattered, that there appeared no good purpoſe, or no purpoſe at all, which ſuch miracles

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miracles could ſerve. We muſt take facts; and every thing authenticated, as are the miracles of Chriſtianity, muſt be a fact. You may account for it as you can; you may refer it to cauſes unknown; you may deem it inexplicable and improbable—But it is a fact; and you muſt at any rate receive it. It is not in the nature of things, that ſuch evidence can exiſt, and the facts which it authenticates not be true.

Had the miracles of Veſpaſian, of the Lamplighter at Paragoſſa, and of the Abbe Paris's tomb, been confirmed by ſuch evidence as that adduced above, they ſhould then have been received as undoubted facts; and as they did not appear in ſuch a ſhape, as to afford, even if true, direct atteſtation to any doctrines of religion, the admiſſion of their truth would not have induced any conſequences inconſiſtent

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conſiſtent with the truth of Chriſtianity.—In the firſt place, there are no other miracles authenticated like thoſe of Chriſtianity. In the ſecond place, if there were other miracles ſo authenticated, they might yet be of ſuch a kind, as that their truth could be admitted, without invalidating, in any degree, the certainty of thoſe which atteſted the Chriſtian miſſion.

But, ſuppoſe that there could be produced miracles equally well atteſted as thoſe of Chriſtianity; ſuppoſe that thoſe miracles bore direct atteſtation to doctrines of religion, unholy, abſurd, and oppoſite to thoſe of Chriſtianity: what would be the conſequence to be inferred? There would not be, here, a conteſt of oppoſite evidences, equally ſtrong, and therefore deſtroying each other; becauſe the two different ſets of evidence would not be applied to the ſame ſubject: But the only

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only conſequence to be inferred, would be, that ſince ſuch evidence had, in one caſe, proved fallacious, it was not impoſſible that it ſhould prove fallacious in other caſes alſo. But this conſequence, were it poſſible to reach it, would be far from overturning the truth of the miracles.

It is obſerved by Paley, that ſuch a caſe as he has ſtated, never occurred; and that this is the point at iſſue. But I apprehend, that if it had been poſſible to carry this point againſt us, the truth of the miracles might ſtill have ſtood. It might have ſtill ſtood, perhaps, upon the firmeſt grounds. For obſerve—there are a very great number of degrees between the impoſſibility of falſehood, and total uncertainty. The evidence, on which, in a thouſand inſtances, we muſt act in the conduct of life—on which juſtice is diſpenſed, and deciſions paſſed on

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on life and death—is of a kind, in which there are ſome degrees of the poſſibility of fallacy. It is an evidence, which, in one inſtance perhaps out of a thouſand, has proved, or may prove fallacious; but the ſoundneſs of which, in the other nine hundred and ninety-nine inſtances, renders it a juſt ground on which to act, and to decide. To whatever degree the number of caſes, in which, out of a thouſand, it is likely to prove ſound, exceeds five hundred; to that degree there is a higher or leſſer probability. At five hundred, there is equilibrium, and incapability of deciſion. To whatever degree the number of caſes, in which it is likely to prove ſound, falls below five hundred; to that degree there is a leſſer or higher improbability.

The diſcovery, therefore, of another caſe, in which ſimilar evidence had proved

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proved unſound, had it been poſſible that ſuch a diſcovery could be made, would have been ſo far from neceſſarily overturning the credibility of the miracles, that it might hardly, in any material degree, have diminiſhed their abſolute certainty; ſince this might only have been one, out of a million of caſes, in which ſuch evidence would prove found. Where evidence is of ſuch a kind, that it never has, nor, from the nature of things, ever can prove fallacious, (of which kind I conſider the evidence ſtated above); in this caſe, you have abſolute certainty; and the facts, thus eſtabliſhed, are as ſure, as the things which ſenſe perceives, or which demonſtration proves. This certainty deſcends to different degrees of probability, or of improbability, according to the multiplying number of caſes in which the evidence would be likely to prove unſound.

It

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It may perhaps be thought by ſome, that there ariſes, againſt the facts which I have been defending, a ſpecies of oppoſite evidence, in the nature of that religion, the truth of which follows from that of the miracles. If confirmation were needed, or if any thing could add confirmation to what is abſolutely certain, this important conſequence would, in my opinion, yield a high confirmation to the truth of the miracles. That religion does, in my opinion, bear brightly, on the face of it, the ſtamp of its heavenly original. The godlike wiſdom, the unſullied purity, the unbending morality, which diſplay, from the pages of the New Teſtament, their reſplendent glory—ſuch as never ſprung from the wiſdom and virtue of the wiſeſt and beſt men—ſuch as could not ſurely ſpring from the hearts and heads of unlearned and baſe-minded impoſtors—do of themſelves, without o-

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ther proofs, point out, by authentic marks, the ſource from whence they flowed. This is a ſubject, capable of moſt beautiful, edifying illuſtration; but on which I cannot now expatiate.

With reſpect to the apparent difficulties to be found in the book that contains this religion, thus brightly traced with the features of Heaven, I requeſt the attention of the reader to the following brief hints.

The Bible is the moſt ancient book in the world. It is written in ſtrange, in dead languages;—languages underſtood deeply by few, completely by none. It alludes to a ſtate of manners, to practices and facts, known imperfectly, or not at all. From theſe circumſtances, it may follow, that the difficulties which are perceived by an unlearned reader, exiſt only

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ly in the tranſlation; and that thoſe which ſtrike others more learned, ariſe from their imperfect knowledge of the original, and their ignorance of circumſtances to which there are alluſions. Some of theſe difficulties may be already explained, by others more acute, more attentive, or more knowing: ſome of them may receive explanation hereafter: and, with reſpect to ſome of them, in themſelves equally explicable, the means of explanation may be now completely loſt. If you read Michaelis's Introductory Lectures to the New Teſtament, you will perceive what profound erudition is requiſite for developing, in the moſt complete manner, the ſhades that antiquity has drawn acroſs the ſacred volume. While the eſſential rule of faith and manners is clear and certain, the complete elucidation of ſcripture, the removal of that veil with which high antiquity hath par-

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tially ſhaded the celeſtial record, is to be gradually effected by the application of profound erudition, and of ſound, enlightened criticiſm. You will keep in mind, therefore, that the cloud of antiquity reſts upon the ſacred volume—a cloud which muſt be penetrated by patient inveſtigation, deep learning, and ſound, accurate criticiſm: nor will you be ſurpriſed, that, from the midſt of this cloud, there ſhould ariſe apparent difficulties, which exiſt only in your ignorance of language, circumſtances, and manners.

With reſpect to the doctrines which Chriſtianity unfolds, there are certain views of them, which may be juſtly called Catholic; which have been held by the great body of Chriſtians, ſince the beginning; which are found in the creed of all eſtabliſhed churches; in which Papiſts

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Papiſts and Proteſtants, Lutherans and Calviniſts, agree; and from which, I would adviſe every man to be extremely cautious of departing. This catholic ſenſe is not an infallible teſt of truth; but it is ſurely entitled to much reſpect. Should, however, any part of the received doctrine appear to you to involve a difficulty which you cannot ſurmount; it will not follow, that you ſhould reject Chriſtianity, but that you ſhould take part with that ſet of Chriſtians, who may have effaced from their creed, the doctrine in which you find unconquerable difficulty. In the variety of opinions which various ſects of Chriſtians hold; in the high antiquity of the ſacred volume, which may well be ſuppoſed, eſpecially to the unlearned, to have drawn over it ſome ſhades of darkneſs; in the unknown and inviſible nature of thoſe ſublime ſubjects, of which the Revelation treats, you may

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find a ſolution or account of every difficulty.

I conclude, then, with this poſition, which I leave with the reader, as that which the preceding evidence appears to entitle me to lay down—That miracles were performed by thoſe who firſt preached Chriſtianity, was, in thoſe days, a matter of notorious and undeniable certainty. It is a matter, to me, as certain as the battle of Pharſalia—as the ſubverſion, by Cæſar, of the liberties of Rome—as the exiſtence, in ancient times, of ſuch a city as Rome. It is a matter, as certain, as the exiſtence of the paper on which I am writing.

FINIS.

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